

Government and Working Group strive to assist dine-in catering premises in improving air change or installing air purifiers (with video)

The Secretary for Food and Health has earlier stipulated a requirement on air change or air purifiers to be complied with in dine-in catering premises in the directions in relation to the catering business under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) (the Regulation). The Working Group, established for the smooth implementation of the requirement, together with relevant government departments have been proactively maintaining close liaison with different stakeholders including catering business operators and ventilation works contractors, and are committed to assisting them to smoothly implement the requirement, so as to protect the health of staff, customers and the public and to fortify the public's confidence in patronising catering premises.

The Working Group and relevant government departments today (April 23) convened a meeting with the Real Estate Developers Association of Hong Kong during which representative from several developers and the Link Asset Management Limited (LINK) also attended. They were briefed on the key concepts and relevant follow-up arrangements regarding enhancement of air change of premises and installation of air purifiers, and their queries addressed. Besides, it was hoped that they could appeal to shopping mall owners to provide assistance to catering premises as far as practicable in terms of providing fresh air supply. Attendees showed their support to fight the virus together and the work of the Working Group.

The Working Group and relevant government departments will organise a webinar on April 27 (Tuesday) to help the trade to master the relevant requirements, and for direct communication between catering business operators and specialist contractors (ventilation works category), so that the relevant ventilation requirement can be implemented promptly.

According to information obtained by the Working Group, there is a stock of around 36 000 air purifiers of models that meet the specified specifications available in the market. Yet individual demand and supply may be subject to commercial considerations.

In addition, the Working Group and relevant government departments visited a number of catering premises (including a bar, a Chinese restaurant, a Hong Kong-style tea restaurant and a hotel restaurant) earlier to learn more about their successful examples and experiences of difficulties encountered.

A Government spokesman said, "To comply with the requirements on air change or air purifiers in catering premises under the Regulation, catering business operators are required to register with the FEHD on or before April 30 that the air change per hour (ACH) at seating areas of their premises has reached at least six, or air purifiers that meet the specified specifications have been installed according to the on-the-ground situation, together with a certificate issued by a registered specialist contractor (ventilation works category). As at April 22, 2 034 catering premises have submitted online registrations and another 129 have submitted online declarations before March 18 through the voluntary declaration scheme."

"Catering premises must submit an application of extension to the FEHD if they are unable to complete the registration on time. The application form was uploaded to the FEHD's webpage (www.fehd.gov.hk/english/licensing/guide_general_reference/Application_for_extension_of_time_for_registration_on_air_change_installation_of_air_purifier_in_catering_premises.html). After submitting the application, catering business operators must complete the registration within the deadline specified in the FEHD's reply. In the meantime, premises which have submitted such an application may provide dine-in service until 9.59pm and be subject to no more than four persons seated together at one table. The FEHD will handle separately cases which did not apply for extension or where their applications have been rejected or failed to follow up completing the registration within the extended time limit specified by the FEHD. However, during the initial stage of the implementation of the new requirement, the department will focus on publicity and education as well as providing advice, and will closely monitor the relevant situation and adjust the arrangements in due course," the spokesman added.

Regarding the directions that the ACH at seating areas of dine-in catering premises must reach at least six, the spokesman reiterated that although there is currently no gold standard worldwide on ventilation requirements for catering premises in response to prevention of COVID-19 transmission, it is generally agreed that improving ventilation measures could assist in minimising the risk of the spread of virus. With reference to various literature around the world, including ventilation standards applicable to non-residential buildings, relevant scientific and clinical research, and information provided by the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers of the United Kingdom and others on design guidelines for ventilation systems at public venues (including catering premises), the Government, after considering relevant factors including effectiveness of the measures and the affordability of the trade, took on board last October the ACH at seating areas of catering premises at six as the threshold for the voluntary declaration system, and announced in March its codification into the mandatory registration system. The ACH at six is equivalent to providing 27 cubic metres of outside air per hour for each person, which is higher than 17 cubic m per hour per person as stipulated under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132).

The spokesman strongly appealed to catering business operators to fight the virus together, and strictly comply with the relevant regulations on

prevention and control of disease in a persistent manner to protect personal and public health.