

Grave sweepers urged to prevent hillfires

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (October 4) reminded people paying their respects to ancestors at graveyards in the countryside during the Chung Yeung Festival period to exercise caution and prevent hillfires.

An AFCD spokesman said it is an offence under the Forests and Countryside Ordinance (Cap 96) to burn incense improperly or leave behind kindling in the countryside. Any person who contravenes the ordinance is liable to a maximum fine of \$25,000 and one year's imprisonment.

"The AFCD will deploy staff and enforcement officers to patrol graveyards in the countryside during the Chung Yeung Festival period. Those who are found breaching the law will be prosecuted," the spokesman said.

The majority of hillfires in the territory are caused by human negligence. Accidents can be prevented if grave sweepers observe some simple guidelines:

- * Remove weeds around graves using tools and never burn weeds with fire;
- * Burning should only be done inside a container or iron bucket;
- * Never leave burning incense unattended; and
- * Make sure all kindling is put out before leaving.

The spokesman said that metal containers will be handed out at suitable locations in the country parks to help grave sweepers burn their offerings properly during the Chung Yeung Festival, adding that barbecues should only be carried out at designated sites in the country parks.

The AFCD will deploy additional country park wardens to step up the fire prevention efforts. They will patrol hillfire black spots and distribute hillfire prevention leaflets together with the Fire Services Department, the Police and the Civil Aid Service. Volunteer teams from the Hong Kong Hiking Association, China, and the Scout Association of Hong Kong will visit grave sweeping areas and hiking trails to disseminate hillfire prevention messages to the public.

The spokesman also reminded members of the public to keep the countryside clean. Before leaving, grave sweepers and barbecue site users should clean up the site and not leave offerings or rubbish behind. As at 29 September, the AFCD had issued fixed penalty notices to 71 persons for littering in country parks this year.