

# Lands Department to step up land control and enforcement work

The Lands Department (LandsD) announced today (July 30) that the Special Duties Task Force (Task Force) has been set up. The Task Force has identified 100 black spots of unlawful occupation of government land involving relatively large areas. Land control actions at these sites are being taken in phases, aiming to be completed within 24 months.

A spokesperson for the LandsD said, to enable more expeditious and effective handling of increasing cases of unlawful occupation of government land and unauthorised structures on private agricultural land in recent years, the department has recently adjusted its enforcement strategies. While District Lands Offices (DLOs) will continue with their routine enforcement duties, the Task Force will step up enforcement against unlawful occupation of sizeable government land and large-scale unauthorised structures on private agricultural land. The results of such operations will be released from time to time.

The Task Force will also proactively detect irregularities by making use of the Geographic Information System and related technologies (for example aerial photos taken by unmanned aerial vehicles) employed by the LandsD's Survey and Mapping Office. The Task Force will analyse relevant land information to enable quick identification of unlawful occupation of government land covering a relatively large area.

Based on the information acquired by means of the technologies and proactive site inspections mentioned above, the Task Force has targeted 100 black spots of unlawful occupation of government land involving relatively large areas (over 1 000 square metres for each site). A preliminary investigation reveals that these sites, mostly in Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and the North District, are mainly used for industrial, storage, logistics and parking purposes.

The Task Force will handle these cases in phases while priority will be accorded to 15 of the above-mentioned black spots covering relatively large pieces of government land (each with an area of 3 000 square metres or above), involving approximately 40 different operators. Land control actions against these sites have commenced. Meanwhile, if unauthorised structures are found on any adjoining private land, the Task Force will also take lease enforcement actions in order to tackle all lease breaches in one go.

The Task Force expects to complete its work against these 15 black spots within nine months, including site clearance or regularisation of unlawful occupation of government land under the existing policy and rectification of lease breaches. Depending on the work's progress, the Task Force will move on to crack down on the remaining black spots in phases in the hope of tackling 100 such sites in various districts within 24 months. Meanwhile, the Task Force will take over cases with serious irregularities from DLOs for

centralised handling so as to expedite enforcement actions.

Currently, there are about 90 officers in the Task Force dedicated to land control and lease enforcement duties, including prosecution and re-entry upon the land concerned. Upon discovery of unauthorised occupation of unleased/unallocated government land, a statutory notice will be posted at the site concerned under the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 28) requiring the occupier to cease occupation before a specified deadline. If the occupation persists after the expiry of the deadline, the Task Force will take further action, including taking possession of the property or structure remaining on the land. If the identity of the occupier can be ascertained with sufficient evidence, the Task Force will consider instituting prosecution.

Regarding unauthorised structures on private agricultural land, the Task Force will expedite lease enforcement actions such as issuing statutory demolition orders and warning letters, registration of warning letters at the Land Registry and ultimately re-entry upon the land.

The spokesperson reminded members of the public not to occupy government land without authorisation. Unlawful occupation of government land is a serious offence. A person is liable to a fine of \$500,000 and to imprisonment for six months on the first occasion on which he or she is convicted of the offence and, in the case of a continuing offence, to a further fine of \$50,000 for each day during which the offence continues. On each subsequent occasion on which the person is convicted of the offence, he or she is liable to a fine of \$1,000,000 and to imprisonment for six months and, in the case of a continuing offence, to a further fine of \$100,000 for each day during which the offence continues. The LandsD also advises landowners to comply with the conditions stipulated in their land leases. Members of the public are urged to check whether their rented structures erected on agricultural land are in breach of land leases or unauthorised under the law, so as to avoid losses or liabilities arising from enforcement actions taken by the Government against such structures in the future.