

LCQ12: Sealing up corridor-facing louvres of public rental housing flats

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

It has been reported that in recent months, the Housing Department (HD) has posted notices in some public rental housing (PRH) estates, stating that the HD must undertake fire safety improvement works pursuant to the requirements of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572), including sealing up all domestic flat louvres facing common exit corridors with fire-resisting boards in phases starting from next year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the numbers of PRH estates and domestic flats involved in the aforesaid works, as well as the implementation schedules;
- (2) as some PRH tenants are worried that their flats will become poorly-lit due to the lack of lighting penetration from the corridors after the relevant works, whether the HD has studied the alternative options, including allocating resources to seal up the louvres with fire-resisting glasses instead of fire-resisting boards, so as to retain the effect of light penetration; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it will assist PRH tenants who have modified their louvres on their own to remove externally-attached objects and carry out reinstatement works, with a waiver of the relevant expenses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it will step up publicity and explanation efforts, so that the affected PRH tenants can gain an understanding of the procedures and implementation progress of the relevant works; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Buildings Department (BD) and Hong Kong Fire Services Department (FSD), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Yang Wing-kit is set out below:

According to the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572) (the Ordinance), composite and domestic buildings constructed on or before March 1, 1987, or with the plans of the buildings works first submitted to the

Building Authority for approval on or before that day (the target buildings) are required to upgrade the fire safety standards to meet modern fire protection requirements. Currently, under the Housing Authority, there are 477 public rental housing (PRH) blocks in 64 estates regulated by the Ordinance.

Since the Ordinance came into effect on July 1, 2007, the Housing Department (HD) has been in close liaison with the BD and FSD to formulate feasible fire safety improvement proposals and implementation details for the target buildings, including conducting assessments of the target buildings; appointing fire engineering consultants to study the works details; as well as liaising with the BD and FSD on the vetting and acceptance processes, etc. The HD has been implementing the improvement works taking into account the difficulty and priority of the projects and basing on the acceptance progress of improvement proposals, scope of works, and co-ordination with other maintenance programmes of the target buildings concerned. In fact, shortly after the Ordinance took effect, some improvement works which are comparatively easy to implement, such as replacement of fire doors and installation of emergency lighting systems, have commenced by phase. Considering the large number of target buildings with varying architectural layout and designs, the HD, BD and FSD have been in close liaison in conducting joint inspections to each target building by phase to determine the required scope of fire safety improvement works for each building. The HD also submitted fire safety improvement proposals based on the requirements and subsequently arranged the necessary improvement works at once upon receipt of the acceptance from the BD and FSD.

With regard to the louver enclosure works at the older PRH blocks, the fire engineering consultant pointed out that the domestic flats concerned are with louvers facing the internal corridor, which is not separated from the escape staircases. Therefore, in the event of fire accidents, the louvers of these flats could not resist fire and smoke, leading to proliferation of fire and smoke through the louvers to the internal corridor or other flats. Notwithstanding that some tenants had adopted different materials and methods to enclose the louvers on their own in the past years for privacy, sound insulation or security concerns, these materials or methods might not render effective fire resistance. The HD is aware that tenants may have different views on the louver enclosure works. Therefore, upon confirmation of the necessity of the enclosure works to enhance fire protection in 2018, the HD requested fire engineering consultants to conduct an in-depth investigation to explore the feasibility of using various materials or methods to formulate the most suitable approach.

Our reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) The enclosure works involved around 240 PRH blocks in 53 estates of around 136 000 domestic flats. The HD first commenced the enclosure works in Fu Shan Estate in late October 2024, and the enclosure works will be progressively arranged in other estates concerned.

(2) After a thorough study on the feasibility and safety of the enclosure

works, upon on-site inspections and multiple discussions with the BD and FSD, the HD has decided to enclose the louver windows facing internal corridors with fire-resisting boards to enhance fire protection. In selection of enclosure materials, the HD has taken into account a wide range of criteria including the impact on the width of internal corridor as the means of escape, the specifications, supply of materials, cost, fire resistance, installation procedures, future maintenance, impact on tenants, etc. In fact, sufficient natural lighting and ventilation has been provided for all relevant domestic flats through balconies and windows.

(3) The HD has deliberated on the specification details and work procedures of the enclosure works. Generally, works could be carried out outside domestic flats. Tenants are not required to attend or bear any cost. If tenants have enclosed the louvers on their own, no reinstatement by tenants is required. The HD will provide necessary assistance to residents for removal of their belongings hung on louvers.

(4) In order to familiarise tenants with the arrangement details of the louver enclosure works, before the commencement of works in Fu Shan Estate, the HD posted notices and photos at the lift lobby on the ground floor and at the lobby on all floors in the PRH blocks concerned, displayed the mock-up of the enclosed louver in the estates, issued letters to affected households, and briefly introduced the progress of the works in Estate Newsletter. During the period of late September to early October 2024, the HD met with a number of Wong Tai Sin District Council members respectively to introduce and answer the enquiries about the relevant fire safety improvement works. In early October 2024, the HD also convened a briefing session on fire safety improvement works with the BD and FSD for tenants of Fu Shan Estate to introduce the Ordinance and the relevant works arrangement. Through the aforesaid publicity and explanatory work, the louver enclosure works in Fu Shan Estate has been implemented smoothly and no complaint related to the relevant works was received during the works period.

The HD will make reference to the practice of Fu Shan Estate in conducting the publicity and explanatory work to PRH tenants in proceeding relevant improvement works in other PRH estates in future.