

LCQ13: Lifeguards employed by Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Following is a question by Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

Regarding the training received and the duties carried out by the two types of lifeguards (i.e. civil service lifeguards and seasonal lifeguards) employed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of occasions last year on which duties involving skin-diving and scuba-diving were carried out by the two aforesaid types of lifeguards, and a breakdown of the details of such duties by (i) name of the public swimming pool complex (complex)/beach where they were on duty and District Council (DC) district to which the complex/beach belonged, and (ii) the diving depth involved;

(2) among the two types of lifeguards, of the respective numbers and percentages of those who currently possess related diving qualifications, with a breakdown of such numbers by (i) name of the complex/beach where they are on duty and (ii) DC district to which the complex/beach belongs;

(3) given that LCSD indicated in 2016 that it would study ways to ensure that all newly recruited lifeguards should complete the three-stage induction training programme (induction training) (including skin-diving rescue), of the progress of such work, and the current number of civil service lifeguards who have not yet completed such training and, among those lifeguards, the number of those who need to perform life-saving duties;

(4) whether LCSD has provided diving training (other than induction training) for in-service lifeguards; if so, of the number of relevant courses organised each month in the past three years, as well as the respective numbers of applicants, those admitted and those passing the relevant tests; whether the lifeguards are required to receive such training and complete the training by a certain deadline, as well as the consequences for their non-compliance;

(5) whether LCSD will (i) require newly recruited lifeguards to possess related diving qualifications upon appointment or within a specific period after appointment, and (ii) encourage in-service lifeguards to obtain the relevant qualifications; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(6) whether there were lifeguards who had not yet completed the induction training being promoted to senior lifeguards in the past three years; if so, of a breakdown of the number of such lifeguards by the type of training which they had not completed;

(7) whether LCSD has deployed lifeguards on duty at beaches who have not yet received relevant training to perform scuba-diving duties; if so, how LCSD ensures that such lifeguards know how to operate the diving equipment;

(8) whether, in respect of the diving duties to be performed by lifeguards, LCSD has (i) formulated standard workflows, safety codes and contingency procedures, (ii) kept relevant work records, and (iii) deployed manpower to manage and maintain the diving equipment;

(9) of the number of times for which oxygen tanks for scuba diving were refilled in the past three years, with a breakdown by (i) name of complex/beach and (ii) DC district to which the complex/beach belonged;

(10) of the number of cases of lifeguards performing diving rescues in the past three years and, among such cases, (i) the respective numbers of those in which the victims were drowned and those in which the victims were rescued, as well as (ii) the number of those in which there was a delay in rescue due to the lifeguards not possessing diving skills;

(11) whether the duties of LCSD's lifeguards include cleaning up oil spill, rubbish, faeces, blood and vomit within the area of the complex/beach concerned; if so, (i) of the respective numbers of cases in which lifeguards performed such types of cleaning duties in the past three years, with a breakdown by name of the complex/beach and by DC district to which the complex/beach belonged, and (ii) whether LCSD has provided training, guidelines and equipment for lifeguards in respect of such duties, and formulated infection prevention measures; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(12) as some lifeguards have indicated that they do not have a clear understanding about their scope of duties, whether LCSD will consider setting out the duties of lifeguards in detail; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(13) given that the duties of lifeguards cover the areas of life-saving, first aid, crowd control, customer services, assisting in law enforcement, etc., but the entry requirement on academic qualification for lifeguards is mere completion of Primary Six, whether LCSD will consider raising the entry requirement on academic qualification for lifeguards; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) currently provides lifeguard services at 44 public swimming pools, 38 gazetted beaches and five water sports centres. As at August 1, 2018, there were 1 959 lifeguards comprising 174 senior lifeguards and 1 785 lifeguards in LCSD. Of those 1 785 lifeguards, 687 lifeguards were non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff employed on a seasonal basis to augment the lifeguard manpower during the swimming season. As regards the 13-part question on the responsibilities,

qualifications and training, departmental guidelines and future development of the lifeguard grade, my reply is as follows:

(1), (7), (10), (11) and (12) The major responsibilities of civil service lifeguards include performing lifesaving and first aid duties, assisting in law enforcement and maintenance of order and assisting in cleansing work. While the major responsibilities of full-time NCSC seasonal lifeguards include ensuring swimmers' safety, performing lifesaving duties, maintenance of order and assisting in cleansing work. Details of the major responsibilities of lifeguards are clearly spelt out in recruitment advertisements and annual staff report of lifeguards. Besides, when newly-appointed lifeguards report for duty, they will be briefed on their duties and work by staff of the department.

As regards rescue operations, lifeguards normally deploy skills taught and assessed in the training associated with the lifeguard qualifications (including underwater search by skin diving, etc.) in drowning incidents. Upon receiving a report of missing swimmer in beach water, lifeguards will carry out rescue operation and call the Police for assistance in the light of the circumstances. In addition to skin diving used in underwater search operations, trained and qualified lifeguards may carry out emergency underwater search for drowning victim(s) using scuba diving equipment under the supervision and instruction of senior lifeguards and assist in the rescue operation upon arrival of the diving personnel of the Fire Services Department where necessary. Lifeguards on duty at beaches without relevant training will not be deployed to carry out scuba diving in rescue and search operations. As skin diving forms one of the basic skills and responsibilities of lifeguards' daily lifesaving work, LCSD does not maintain relevant statistics. Details on the scuba diving work undertaken by lifeguards in 2017 are at Annex I. In the three cases of missing swimmers in the past three years, in addition to the use of skin diving, scuba diving was also carried out in the search operations. Despite having made all-out efforts in these rescues, the goal of saving the victims did not achieve. LCSD has no record of delayed rescue pertaining to the lack of diving knowledge/skills on the part of lifeguards.

Contractors are normally hired by LCSD for other tasks requiring diving for prolonged periods, e.g. underwater inspection or maintenance of facilities, etc. For instance, two professional contractors have been hired for inspection and maintenance of shark prevention nets respectively. The inspection contractor will deploy professional divers to conduct inspections to ensure proper maintenance of the shark prevention nets by the maintenance contractor. LCSD staff at the beaches may, as and when necessary, require the contractors concerned to conduct comprehensive inspection or carry out comprehensive maintenance of the shark prevention nets above and under water in accordance with the contract requirements. The diving tasks required for the inspection of the seabed conditions and the clearance work in the aftermath of the passage of Typhoon Mangkhut are undertaken by the outsourced contractors.

One of the major responsibilities of lifeguards is to assist in

cleansing work. To keep pool water clean, officers-in-charge of swimming pools will deploy lifeguards to carry out cleansing work once refuse, faeces or vomitus is found. When LCSD is notified by the Marine Department of any oil spill incident near beach area or when venue staff find signs of oil contamination of beaches, officers-in-charge of beaches will lead and direct lifeguards and venue staff to assist in handling the incident, including monitoring whether beaches will be contaminated with oil spills, assisting and advising swimmers to go back to the shore, preventing dispersion of oil to beaches and assisting to clean up the contaminated sand, etc., in accordance with LCSD's emergency response plan for handling oil pollution. LCSD provides appropriate personal protective equipment for lifeguards to carry out these tasks. Besides, guidelines have also been drawn up for the tasks concerned (including preventive measures against infectious diseases) with relevant training provided for lifeguards.

Statistics relating to the number of cases involving handling of oil spills, waste, faeces and vomitus in the past three years broken down by public swimming complexes/beaches and the District Council district of the swimming complexes/beaches are at Annex II.

(2) to (6) It is LCSD's requirement that all serving lifeguards and lifeguards to be recruited shall possess the Pool Lifeguard Award and Beach Lifeguard Award issued by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society (HKLSS). The Pool Lifeguard Award and Beach Lifeguard Award issued by HKLSS are internationally recognised lifesaving qualifications by the International Life Saving Federation (ILSF). As underwater rescue by skin diving is already an item to be assessed for the relevant Lifeguard Awards, all lifeguards have already possessed the skin diving skills for underwater rescue operation. On the other hand, scuba diving is not required to be assessed for the relevant Lifeguard Awards, and LCSD does not require lifeguards to possess any qualification on scuba diving.

To enhance the knowledge and skills of lifeguards, LCSD provides induction course on advanced skills on skin diving rescue to newly recruited civil service lifeguards every year. Besides, the department also provides skills enhancement programmes to serving lifeguards, including courses on advanced skills on skin diving rescue and scuba diving rescue. Civil service lifeguards posted to beaches and water sports centres have priority in joining scuba diving rescue courses. As at August 1, 2018, 942 and 392 civil service lifeguards of LCSD have received advanced training in skin diving rescue and training in scuba diving respectively.

Diving trainings provided for civil service lifeguards of LCSD in the past three years is in Table 1.

LCSD has been providing adequate training places for courses on scuba diving rescue for civil service lifeguards. The actual number of training places depends on the number of applicants for the courses. At present, applications from lifeguards to enrol in training courses due to operational needs are all accepted. LCSD will continue providing sufficient training places to meet its actual operational needs.

The requirement for serving lifeguards to take a mandatory training course (that is the integrated refresher course on Lifeguard Award) has been strictly implemented by LCSD. Moreover, the department will continue to provide sufficient training places to enable newly recruited lifeguards to complete the induction training programme as soon as possible so that they may practise their job skills and refresh their lifesaving knowledge and skills. At present, 119 civil service lifeguards in LCSD are yet to complete the induction training programme within three years after appointment. LCSD has arranged for all of them to complete the training programme this winter and issued letters to urge them to make best use of the training opportunities provided by the department to complete the programme. LCSD will actively monitor the situation and arrange for newly appointed lifeguards to complete the induction training programme as soon as possible.

According to the records of LCSD, there has been no successful application from lifeguards who have not completed the required induction training programme (Note 1) for the post of senior lifeguards for the past three years.

(8) and (9) LCSD has departmental guidelines on beach management, which require officers-in-charge of beaches to brief newly posted lifeguards on their duties in detail to ensure that all lifeguards are familiar with the use of lifesaving facilities and equipment of the beach and that they know well the safety rules for swimmers as well as the accident-prone areas. Senior lifeguards are required to give instructions on the use of lifesaving equipment. Besides, the guidelines also require all lifeguards to participate in regular rescue drills (including diving training) and drills for rescue plans at their workplace to ensure that they are familiar with the corresponding rescue operation under different circumstances.

Currently, officers-in-charge of swimming pools and beaches maintain and arrange for maintenance of diving equipment and gears at their venues. The courses on scuba diving provided by the department have already covered areas on the relevant safety rules, points to note, maintenance and repair requirements for equipment concerned, etc. Information on the frequency of refilling of diving cylinders at swimming pools, beaches and water sports centres of LCSD in the past three years are at Annex III.

(13) The major responsibility of civil service lifeguards (including Artisan (Beach/Swimming Pool) and Artisan (Lifeguard at Water Sports Centre)) is to provide lifesaving and related services. Hence, it is LCSD's requirement that applicants for the post shall possess a valid Beach Lifeguard Award and/or Pool Lifeguard Award issued by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society (HKLSS) (the internationally recognised lifesaving qualifications) to prove that they possess internationally recognised competence to perform lifesaving and lifeguard duties. Besides, LCSD also provides induction training to newly appointed lifeguards and opportunities for serving lifeguards to refresh and enhance skills through various trainings arranged every winter. LCSD will review the entry requirements for Artisan (Beach/ Swimming Pool) and Artisan (Lifeguard at Water Sports Centre) from time to time to meet the actual operational needs.

Note 1: The induction training programme was implemented since 2009. Lifeguards appointed before 2009 were not required to undergo the induction training. According to the records, 10 lifeguards appointed before the launch of the induction training programme were successful in their application for the post of senior lifeguards.