

LCQ21: The manpower situation of Lifeguards

Following is a question by the Hon Wu Chi-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (January 16):

Question:

A lifeguard union has pointed out that currently, public swimming pools, public beaches and private swimming pools are often plagued by the problem of not having sufficient number of lifeguards on duty. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of private swimming pools issued with a licence by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) under the Swimming Pools Regulation (Cap 132 sub leg CA) (the Regulation) as at December 31 last year, with a breakdown by District Council district set out in a table;

(2) as the Regulation stipulates that the licensee of a swimming pool shall, at all times during which the pool is open to swimmers, deploy not less than two lifeguards possessing valid certificates of competency in life saving and first aid to be in attendance at the pool, of (i) the number of inspections of licensed private swimming pools carried out by FEHD officers for this requirement, (ii) the respective numbers of cases of FEHD receiving reports and substantiating that a licensee has breached this requirement, and (iii) the details of the follow-up actions taken by FEHD on the substantiated cases, in each of the past three years;

(3) as a lifeguard union has pointed out that the pay levels of the lifeguards of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) are lower than the market levels, resulting in recruitment difficulties and insufficient lifeguards at public swimming pools and public beaches, of the respective pay levels of newly recruited civil service lifeguards and contract seasonal lifeguards under LCSD in each of the past three years, and how such pay levels compare with the market levels; and

(4) as LCSD requires that all serving and newly recruited lifeguards must possess the Pool Lifeguard Award and the Beach Lifeguard Award issued by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society, whether it knows the number of persons who took the examinations for lifeguard awards in each of the past three years; if such figures are not available, whether it will compile such statistics; whether it will adopt new measures to attract more people to take such examinations for lifeguard awards?

Reply:

President,

As regards the various parts of the question, after consulting the Food and Health Bureau and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), my reply is as follows:

(1) In accordance with the Swimming Pools Regulation (Cap 132CA) (the Regulation), any artificially constructed pool used for swimming or bathing and to which the public have access (whether on payment or otherwise) or which is operated by any club, institution, association or other organisation, is required to obtain a swimming pool licence from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), unless not more than 20 residential units is served and the public have no access to it. As at December 31, 2018, there were 1 277 licensed swimming pools in Hong Kong. A breakdown of the number of licensed swimming pools by District Council districts is set out at Annex 1.

(2) Monthly inspection is conducted by the FEHD staff when the licensed swimming pool is open to swimmers to ensure compliance of the Regulation and licensing conditions by licensees. The inspection frequencies may be increased if necessary. According to the Regulation, the licensee of a swimming pool shall, at all times during which the pool is open to swimmers, deploy not less than two lifeguards possessing valid certificates of competency in life saving and first aid to the pool, unless modification to the requirement is approved by the licensing authority.

During inspection, if FEHD staff found that licensed swimming pool breaches the Regulation, the licensee will be immediately prosecuted. If the licensee fails to comply with the relevant licensing conditions, including the provision of required number of lifeguards at the swimming pool as specified in the licence, warning will be issued to the licensee immediately. If the licensee fails to rectify the irregularities within the specific time or repeatedly violates the licensing conditions, FEHD will consider suspending or cancelling the licence.

Of the complaints concerning licensed swimming pools received by the FEHD in the past three years, there were 19 cases (in 2016), 12 cases (in 2017) and 14 cases (in 2018) against insufficient provision of lifeguards respectively. These complaints were found unjustified after investigation. During the period, there was no issue of warning, prosecution and suspension or cancellation of the swimming pool licence by FEHD in relation to insufficient provision of lifeguards at swimming pools.

(3) At present, civil service lifeguards recruited by the LCSD belong to the Artisan grade, with the starting pay point at Master Pay Scale point 5 (currently \$16,790). The Government adjusts the civil service pay scales under the established mechanism to adjust the pay for civil servants (including civil service lifeguards). The department has not encountered difficulties in recruiting civil service lifeguards.

As regards to the non-civil service contract (NCSC) seasonal lifeguards, in view of the short-term job nature, the mobility of NCSC seasonal lifeguards is comparatively higher. In order to maintain the attractiveness

of the pay of seasonal lifeguards, LCSD adheres to the principle of keeping the pay of seasonal lifeguards broadly comparable with that of their private sector counterparts. To this end, starting from 2004, reference has been made to the local private employment market in terms of pay level of lifeguards and other important relevant factors, including LCSD's fiscal position and the Composite Consumer Price Index, etc. in determining the annual pay adjustment for seasonal lifeguards.

The salaries of civil service lifeguards and NCSC seasonal lifeguards recruited by the LCSD in the past three years are set out at Annex 2.

(4) The numbers of persons who took part in the examinations in respect of the Pool Lifeguard Award and Beach Lifeguard Award in the past three years, according to the information provided by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society (HKLSS), are set out at Annex 3. The HKLSS is the only body recognised by the International Life Saving Federation for assessing and awarding lifeguard qualifications in Hong Kong. LCSD will work closely with the HKLSS to encourage enhancement of publicity and promotional activities by the affiliated clubs to attract more people to participate in life-saving awards training and examination.