

LCQ8: Lifeguards employed by Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (April 17):

Question:

Regarding civil service lifeguards and non-civil service contract seasonal lifeguards employed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective (i) staffing establishments, (ii) strengths and (iii) vacancy rates of the two types of lifeguards in each of the past two years, with a breakdown by the District Council district to which the public swimming pool complexes/beaches that they were stationed belong, as well as by peak and non-peak season;

(2) in respect of the public swimming pool complexes and beaches under the LCSD, of the respective numbers of days in each of the past two years on which they (i) were partially closed and (ii) were completely closed/had lifeguard services suspended, due to an insufficient number of lifeguards on duty, with a breakdown by the cause for the insufficient number of lifeguards on duty (e.g. quite a number of lifeguards taking sick leave or industrial actions);

(3) as some lifeguards have relayed that they have been assigned to carry out tasks unspecified in their terms of employment, e.g. handling oil spills and carrying out scuba diving rescue and search operations, whether the LCSD will, when conducting recruitment exercises in future, consider specifying in detail in the terms of employment the duties of lifeguards (including whether they are required to carry out the two tasks);

(4) whether the LCSD will require that all lifeguards must complete the following training courses: (i) the course on advanced skills of skin diving rescue under the induction training programme (with the requirement of passing a five-metre depth diving test), and (ii) the in-service training course on scuba diving rescue which is currently provided only to civil service lifeguards; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) as a seasonal lifeguard who had not possessed a recognised diving qualification was drowned in September last year while undertaking a diving task, whether the LCSD will review the arrangements for lifeguards to carry out diving tasks, and formulate relevant work guidelines (including the requirement for conducting regular drills and the procedure for carrying out diving rescue and search operations); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

At present, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) manages 44 public swimming pools and 41 gazetted beaches. Lifeguard services are provided at public swimming pools and 38 beaches. In addition to civil service lifeguards, non-civil service contract (NCSC) seasonal lifeguards are also employed on a seasonal basis to augment the manpower of lifeguards during the swimming season. My reply to Hon Ma Fung-kwok's question is as follows:

(1) The staff establishment, strength and percentage of vacancy of lifeguards for the LCSD's public swimming pools/beaches in the past two years with breakdown by district are set out at Annex 1.

(2) The numbers of days on which public swimming pools were fully or partially temporarily closed and lifeguard services at gazetted beaches were suspended due to inadequate lifeguards in the past two years are set out at Annex 2 and Annex 3 respectively.

(3) The major responsibilities of civil service lifeguards include lifesaving and first aid, assisting in law enforcement and maintaining order and assisting in cleansing work, while the major responsibilities of full-time NCSC seasonal lifeguards include ensuring swimmers' safety, lifesaving, maintaining order and assisting in cleansing work. Major responsibilities of lifeguards are clearly spelt out in recruitment advertisements and annual performance appraisals of lifeguards. Besides, LCSD venue staff will brief newly posted lifeguards on their duties and work.

(4) All civil service lifeguards of the LCSD possess the Pool Lifeguard Award and Beach Lifeguard Award. As underwater rescue by skin diving is already an item assessed for the relevant Lifeguard Awards, all lifeguards have already possessed the skin diving skills for underwater rescue operation to perform daily lifesaving tasks. Besides, the LCSD provides course on advanced skills of skin diving rescue for all newly recruited lifeguards and serving civil service lifeguards so as to enhance their skills in skin diving and underwater search and rescue, and familiarise them with the relevant safety rules and the use of skin diving gear, such as fins, diving masks, snorkels etc. The course on advanced skills of skin diving rescue is one of the induction training programmes for lifeguards. Starting from 2019, the LCSD will arrange for newly appointed civil service lifeguards and NCSC lifeguards on long-term employment to complete part of the induction training programme before assuming duties, including the course on advanced skills of skin diving rescue. Upon completion of the course on advanced skills of skin diving rescue and passing a five-metre depth diving test, coupled with regular drills at swimming pools/beaches, lifeguards should possess sufficient skin diving skills and physical competence to work as a team to carry out search and rescue operation in deep water at swimming pools/beaches.

Although scuba diving is not one of the major responsibilities of

lifeguards, under urgent circumstances, say before the arrival of diving personnel of the Fire Services Department (FSD), trained and qualified beach lifeguards will carry out emergency underwater search using scuba diving equipment under the supervision and direction of senior lifeguards while awaiting the arrival of the diving personnel of FSD. The LCSD does not require lifeguards to possess any qualification on scuba diving mandatorily. To enhance the knowledge and skills of lifeguards, the LCSD provides course on rescue skills with scuba diving to serving civil service lifeguards. The course aims at providing lifeguards with training in scuba diving skills and underwater search and rescue using scuba diving equipment. It also covers knowledge in marine environment, the relevant safety rules and contingency measures etc. The LCSD has been providing adequate training places for courses on scuba diving rescue for serving civil service lifeguards. The actual number of training places depends on the number of applicants for the courses. Civil service lifeguards posted to beaches and water sports centres have priority in joining such courses.

(5) The LCSD has put in place various measures to ensure that lifeguards understand and be familiar with their roles and duties, and provides related support, including:

(i) the LCSD has drawn up guidelines on the management of swimming pools and beaches, which require officers-in-charge 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 venue and that they know well the accident-prone areas and the safety rules for swimmers etc. Senior lifeguards are required to give instructions on the use of lifesaving equipment.

(ii) the departmental guidelines 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.

(iii) officers-in-charge of swimming pools and beaches are required to manage and arrange for maintenance of diving equipment and gears at their venues.

(iv) the courses on skin diving and scuba diving provided by the LCSD have already covered areas on the relevant safety rules, points to note, maintenance and repair requirements for equipment etc.

Having regard to the concerns expressed by some lifeguards about diving duties, the LCSD will further review the situation and draw up more detailed guidelines on scuba-diving duties for the staff.