

LCQ8: Members of the public carrying out outdoor activities under inclement weather

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (September 8):

Question:

In recent years, some members of the public have taken risks by carrying out outdoor activities such as hiking as well as chasing wind and wave during inclement weather, and accidents of their sustaining injuries or deaths have occurred from time to time. For example, on July 20 this year when the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 and the Amber Rainstorm Warning Signal were in force, a man was washed away by rapids while hiking in a stream in Ma On Shan and died unfortunately. Such members of the public not only recklessly disregarded their own safety, but also put search and rescue (S&R) personnel in danger. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) among the S&R calls involving outdoor activities received by the authorities in the past five years, of the number of those received when weather warnings were in force, and set out, by date of receipt, the outdoor activities and the number of S&R personnel involved in each call as well as the government departments to which such personnel belonged;
- (2) of the average amount of public expenditure incurred in each of the S&R operations relating to the calls mentioned in (1), with a breakdown by the government departments and the types of equipment (including inflatable boats and helicopters) involved;
- (3) whether it will study closing off dangerous hills and waters during the periods when specified weather warnings are in force, and prohibiting members of the public from going up such hills or going out to such waters during such periods without justifiable reasons, so as to prevent them from encountering danger;
- (4) whether it will, by following the practices of the management authorities of the national parks in the United States, the authorities of the Taiwan region or certain prefectural governments of Japan, levy a post-incident "S&R charge" on those members of the public who have taken risks by carrying out outdoor activities under inclement weather during which they have encountered danger and called for help, so as to achieve punitive and deterrent effects; and
- (5) whether it has plans to step up education and publicity efforts, so as to educate members of the public not to carry out high-risk outdoor activities

under inclement weather; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

Different government departments have been appealing to and reminding members of the public of the risks to perform outdoor activities under inclement weather through various channels to prevent accidents. Besides, relevant departments constantly review their emergency response capabilities, and step up their educational and publicity efforts to raise public awareness.

Having consulted the relevant bureaux and departments, our consolidated reply to the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan's question is as follows:

(1) From January 1, 2017 to July 31, 2021, the numbers of mountain rescue/immersion incidents handled by the Fire Services Department (FSD) when an Amber, a Red or Black Rainstorm Warning, or Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or above was issued by the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) are tabulated below:

Year/ Month	Number of mountain rescue incidents		Number of immersion incidents	
	When a rainstorm warning was in force	When Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No.3 or above was in force	When a rainstorm warning was in force	When Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No.3 or above was in force
2017	2	2	2	3
2018	2	4	1	0
2019	1	1	3	1
2020	4	2	2	0
2021 (As of July 31)	3	0	1	0

The numbers of fire and ambulance personnel mobilised for the above rescue operations are tabulated below:

2017

Type of Incident	Date	Location	Number of Fire Personnel	Number of Ambulance Personnel
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Mountain Rescue	May 24	Kau Ling Chung, Lantau	30	6
	June 12	Pang Ching Court, Wong Tai Sin	18	6
	July 18	Bride's Pool Road, Tai Po	15	3
	October 14	Hoi Pui Leng, Sha Tau Kok	12	3
Immersion	June 17	In the waters off Waterfall Bay, Pokfulam	29	3
	July 18	In the waters off Ma Tau Kok Public Pier, To Kwa Wan	33	3
	August 22	In the waters of Castle Peak Road – Ting Kau	31	3
	August 23	In the waters off Ma Tau Kok Public Pier, To Kwa Wan	34	3
	October 15	In the waters off Cheung Fai Road, Tsing Yi	32	3

2018

Type of Incident	Date	Location	Number of Fire Personnel	Number of Ambula
Mountain Rescue	June 17	Wong Lung Hang, Lantau	14	6
	June 17	Lantau Trail, Lantau	13	3
	August 22	Wilson Trail Section 1	13	3
	September 1	Tai Lam Chung, Tuen Mun	25	6
	September 12	Nei San Stream, Lantau	17	3
	November 1	Kau Nga Ling, Lantau	18	3

Immersion	August 20	In the waters off Western District Public Cargo Working Area	33	3
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2019

Type of Incident	Date	Location	Number of Fire Personnel	Number of Ambula
Mountain Rescue	April 19	Wong Lung Stream, Lantau	17	3
	September 1	Coastal area, Redhill Peninsula, Southern District	20	3
Immersion	April 20	In waters at Cape D'Aguilar, Southern District	176	6
	July 20	Sam Ka Tsuen Typhoon Shelter, Kwun Tong	32	4
	July 31	In the waters off Tsim Sha Tsui	45	4
	August 25	Riverside, Discovery Bay Road	22	3

2020

Type of Incident	Date	Location	Number of Fire Personnel	Number of Ambula
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Mountain Rescue	June 7	South Lantau Country Trail	15	3
	June 14	Wong Lung Stream, Lantau	16	3
	July 31	Ngan Wan, Chai Wan	13	3
	August 5	Yuk Kwai Shan, Southern District	32	6
	September 12	Nam Long Shan, Southern District	17	3
	September 12	High Island Reservoir, Sai Kung	11	3
Immersion	February 13	In the waters off Pearl Island, Tuen Mun	93	15
	June 7	Sam Ka Tsuen Typhoon Shelter, Kwun Tong	27	3

2021 (as of July 31, 2021)

Type of Incident	Date	Location	Number of Fire Personnel	Number of Ambula
Mountain Rescue	June 11	Lo Fu Tau Country Trail, Lantau	23	6
	June 14	Cheung Sheung, Sai Kung	11	6
	July 31	Ma Dai Stream, Sha Tin	64	6
Immersion	June 1	In the waters off Turtle Cove, Southern District	76	15

The FSD was mainly responsible for the above rescue operations. The Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), the Government Flying Service (GFS) and the Civil Aid Service (CAS) provided appropriate support when needed and do not maintain statistics on the personnel deployed in these operations.

(2) When calls for emergency services are received, the FSD, the HKPF, the GFS and the CAS will deploy suitable manpower and rescue equipment to the scene depending on the situations.

Taking a mountain search and rescue incident as an example, the FSD will deploy the Mountain Search and Rescue Team, Mountain Search and Rescue Support Team, mountain search and rescue dogs and specialised mountain rescue equipment including portable stretcher and rescue drone to the scene; the CAS will deploy the Mountain Search and Rescue Company; and the GFS will deploy rescue helicopter to assist the search and convey the injured.

As regards response to reports of immersion and missing persons, the FSD will dispatch its Diving Tender, Speedboat and rescue equipment including Underwater Remotely Operated Vehicle and Remote Controlled Lifesaving Float to the scene; the HKPF will deploy police launch; and the GFS will deploy rescue helicopter to assist the rescue operations as appropriate.

The departments do not maintain statistics on the equipment deployed and the expenses involved in handling every emergency case.

(3) When the Black Rainstorm Warning Signal or Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above is issued by the HKO under inclement weather conditions, staff at the gazetted beaches under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) will, according to the existing guidelines, hoist red flags and put up notices, broadcast announcement on suspension of lifeguard services to warn beach visitors against entering the water, and advise them to leave as soon as possible so as to prevent accidents.

As regards prohibiting vessels from setting sail, when issuing operating licences for local vessels, the Marine Department (MD) will, according to the regulation, require owners and coxswains of local vessels to cease vessel operations and seek suitable locations for shelter to ensure safety when a typhoon signal is hoisted in Hong Kong or under inclement weather. Moreover, every year as the typhoon season is drawing near, the MD will remind persons in control of local vessels to check their vessels and make appropriate shelter arrangements as soon as possible, including proceeding to typhoon shelters which can accommodate the vessels for anchoring.

(4) It is a long-standing practice of the Government to take swift and effective response to all emergency situations which pose threat to life, property and public security. While the Government strongly discourages the public from performing risky outdoor activities under inclement weather, the Government will still provide effective, reliable and efficient emergency services to people in distress or in need under all circumstances. The last thing we want to see is any people in need being hesitant in asking for help from emergency services due to any reasons, like levy.

(5) On stepping up educational and publicity efforts, relevant departments are striving to promote the importance of safety in water activities and mountaineering as follows.

Water Safety

(i) The MD organises safety seminars every year before the typhoon season begins. Relevant departments including the LCSD and the HKPF are invited to give talks on water safety under inclement weather, reminding the public to

make adequate preparations before participating in water activities for the sake of safety. Furthermore, the MD produces and distributes various promotional leaflets to advise the public against engaging in high-risk activities at sea under inclement weather and to take heed of water safety. These promotional leaflets and videos for the safety of water activities are available on the MD's website for public access.

(ii) Apart from providing information such as the Water Safety Guidelines, General Rules on Water Safety and Do's And Don'ts at Beaches and Swimming Pools on its website, the LCSD also advises the public to take heed of water safety through various channels, such as swimmers' handbooks and posters, as well as Announcements in the Public Interest on television and radio. In addition, to further promote public awareness of water safety, the LCSD launches the Water Safety Campaign every year in collaboration with the Hong Kong Life Saving Society, activities of which include slogan competitions and poster design competitions for primary and secondary school students.

Mountaineering Safety

(iii) The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) endeavours to promote safe hiking in country park, such as paying attention to the weather conditions when planning a hike, through various channels including exhibitions, seminars, website, social media, videos and posters. The AFCD has also posted weather information QR codes on country park information boards and installed electronic display panels at some popular spots in country parks to provide real-time weather information and forecast, such that countryside visitors may adjust their hiking routes as necessary.

(iv) The FSD makes use of different social media platforms, such as its website and Facebook page, to disseminate information on safety of participating in outdoor activities, including tips on pre-trip preparation, points to note on safety during the activities and ways to seek help when in distress. It also issues warnings as the circumstances require to remind the public to pay attention to the weather conditions and refrain from performing outdoor activities under inclement weather.

(v) The CAS organises Mountaineering Safety Promotion Day regularly and hosts mountaineering and hiking safety seminars for secondary school students to enhance the public's knowledge and safety awareness in mountaineering.

(vi) The HKPF conducts regular joint exercises with relevant departments and organisations (including St. John Ambulance Brigade and public transport operators) and invites the public to participate in them, with a view to enabling the public to understand the importance of safe conduct of outdoor activities.