

LCQ9: Lifeguard manpower and water quality of public swimming pools

Following is a question by Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (June 20):

Question:

Recently, a number of swimming pool complexes under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) were wholly or partially closed temporarily due to an insufficient number of lifeguards on duty. Some lifeguard unions have estimated that 900 lifeguards will be needed to fully meet the needs during the swimming season. However, there are only a total of some 400 full-time and part-time lifeguards at present. On the other hand, there have been reports from time to time in recent years about the poor water quality of public swimming pools and its potential perils to swimmers' health. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the staff establishment, strength and number of vacancies of lifeguards of LCSD (including civil service lifeguards and non-civil service contract seasonal lifeguards) in the past three years, and set out a breakdown by name of public swimming pool complex/beach and the District Council (DC) district to which the complex/beach belonged, as well as by peak and non-peak swimming season;
- (2) of the details of partial or whole closures of public swimming pool complexes/beaches (including the reasons for and number of closures and the types of facilities involved) each month in the past three years, and set out a breakdown by name of public swimming pool complex/beach and the DC district to which the complex/beach belonged;
- (3) of the attendance of various public swimming pool complexes in each of the past three years, and set out a breakdown by mode of admission (i.e. paying the normal rate, paying the concessionary rate, holding a monthly ticket and being a group user), name of public swimming pool complex and the DC district to which it belonged;
- (4) given that several new swimming pools will be completed in the coming several years and that some existing swimming pools will be converted into heated pools and have their service hours extended, whether the authorities have reviewed the staff establishment, grade structure, remuneration and promotion prospect of lifeguards, and the recruitment ratio of civil service lifeguards and non-civil service contract seasonal lifeguards, so as to ensure that there will be sufficient lifeguards on duty;
- (5) of the number of complaints received by LCSD in each of the past three years about the water quality of swimming pools, and set out a breakdown by

name of public swimming pool complex and the DC district to which it belonged, as well as by content of complaint; and

(6) as some studies have pointed out that the urea content in the water of public swimming pools is on the high side, posing potential perils to public health, whether the current filtering systems at public swimming pools are effective in filtering out urea; whether LCSD will consider making urea content in the pool water one of the parameters to be monitored; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Currently, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) manages 44 public swimming pools, 41 gazetted public beaches, and five water sports centres across the territory. The safety of swimmers has always been the prime concern for LCSD in arranging the manpower of lifeguards. My reply to the six parts of the question is as follows:

(1) A breakdown of the staff establishment, strength and vacancies of lifeguards at swimming pools/beaches in the past 3 years by district is tabulated at Annex 1.

(2) LCSD will consider closing the entire swimming pool complexes or suspend the lifeguard services at beaches in response to unexpected incidents such as inclement weather, water pollution at swimming pools/beaches, urgent repair works, red tide, oil spill or unexpected absence of lifeguards, etc. Details on the closure of the entire swimming pool complexes or the suspension of lifeguard services at beaches for the reasons mentioned above in the past three years are at Annex 2. In daily operation, swimming complexes will also be partially suspended in response to factors such as regular alternate inspections and maintenance, partial failure of facilities, manpower resources of lifeguards, usage pattern of swimmers, possible impact to outdoor facilities due to adverse weather conditions like lightning, thunder, rainstorm and water pollution (such as presence of vomitus), etc. Detailed statistical figures on partial suspension of swimming pools are not available. Besides, there is no partial closure of beaches.

(3) A breakdown of the attendances at public swimming pools in the past three years by district and swimming pool is tabulated at Annex 3.

(4) LCSD attaches great importance to human resource management of lifeguards for the sake of swimmer's safety. The department is actively reviewing the establishment and remuneration of lifeguards and has implemented a number of policies and management measures to ensure adequate lifeguards are available to provide services at swimming pools and beaches. Regarding the manpower ratio of civil service lifeguards to non-civil service contract seasonal lifeguards, the review needs to consider various factors, such as the operating hours of swimming pools and beaches in a year and during swimming season, the number of swimmers, the manpower demand due to

increasing number of swimming facilities in future, etc. Generally speaking, civil service lifeguards are employed for service needs which are steady throughout the year while non-civil service contract seasonal lifeguards are employed for service needs which are seasonal in nature. In the past few years, there has been a steady increase in the number of civil service lifeguards and there is also an increased number of non-civil service contract seasonal lifeguards. Details of the human resources policies, management measures and the growth in the number of lifeguards are at Annex 4.

(5) A breakdown of the number of complaints received by LCSD about pool water quality by district and swimming pool is tabulated at Annex 5.

(6) LCSD attaches great importance to the hygiene of public swimming pools. Pool water of its public swimming pools is continuously circulated, filtered and sterilised throughout the opening hours. Making reference to the guidelines issued by the World Health Organization (the Guidelines), LCSD has drawn up parameters for monitoring the water quality of its public swimming pools. Such parameters include, among other things, the Free Residual Chlorine, pH value, total bacteria count, E. coli, Vibrio cholerae and turbidity of pool water. According to the Guidelines, urea content is not one of the parameters to be monitored for pool water. In addition, LCSD consults the Department of Health from time to time on issues relating to hygiene and health. To ensure that the hygiene of pool water is up to standard, apart from taking water samples for testing of residual chlorine levels and pH value on an hourly basis during opening hours, LCSD has also assigned accredited laboratories to conduct testing on the pool water of its swimming pools on a weekly basis to ascertain that the water quality is up to the relevant standard. Furthermore, publicity efforts have also been stepped up to urge swimmers to observe personal hygiene, including reminding them not to pollute pool water and to go through a shower and visit the toilet before swimming, etc.