

Ombudsman probes effectiveness of Joint Office for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints in handling water seepage complaints

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Connie Lau, today (November 7) announced a direct investigation to examine the effectiveness of the Joint Office for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints (JO) in handling water seepage complaints, with a view to making recommendations for improvement.

High-rise buildings are ubiquitous in Hong Kong. Poorly maintained water pipes or waterproofing materials in the floor slabs of an upper floor unit would likely cause seepage to the unit below, giving rise to environmental hygiene nuisance. Upon receipt of a water seepage complaint, the JO, which is composed of staff from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Buildings Department, will conduct investigation and tests. Should an upper floor unit be confirmed as the source of water seepage, the JO will issue a Nuisance Notice requiring that necessary repairs be carried out by that unit.

Between January 2016 and September 2018 (i.e. 33 months in total), the Office of The Ombudsman had received 360 complaints against the JO for failing to properly handle water seepage problems. Many complainants alleged that despite the JO taking a long time to conduct various tests, the source of water seepage still remained unidentified. The JO relies mainly on colour water tests to locate the source of seepage. While the Office may at times engage a consultant to use newer technologies (such as infrared or microwave detectors) in dealing with more complicated cases, that is not a general practice.

Ms Lau said, "Prolonged water seepage can cause great nuisance to the parties affected and would lead to environmental hygiene problems. We have initiated this direct investigation with a view to exploring with the JO better ways to effectively resolve water seepage complaints."

To make the investigation more comprehensive, The Ombudsman is now inviting the public to send in information and/or views in writing to the Office of The Ombudsman by December 8, 2018:

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