

Owner convicted of overcharging subdivided unit tenants for water

The Water Supplies Department (WSD) announced that an owner of a subdivided flat on Shek Kin Street, Kwai Chung, New Territories, was convicted today (November 21) of overcharging its subdivided unit (SDU) tenants for water, in contravention of regulation 47 of the Waterworks Regulations. The owner pleaded guilty to 22 counts of offences at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts and was fined \$22,000.

This is the 23rd similar conviction since the first conviction in June 2022, with associated fines ranging from \$1,000 to \$22,000.

A spokesman for the WSD said that the Waterworks (Amendment) Ordinance 2024 (the amended WWO) has strengthened the power of the Water Authority in evidence collection and information disclosure during the investigation of suspected cases of overcharging for water. The Water Authority can request the landlords, their agents, etc, to provide the tenancy agreements, receipts or payment records for charges for water. Failure to comply with such a request can be an offence and the offender is liable on conviction to a maximum fine of \$10,000 and a further fine of up to \$1,000 for each day the offence continues. It is anticipated that there will be more prosecution cases. The maximum penalty for overcharging SDU tenants for water has been raised to \$25,000 to deter this illegal act. Moreover, providing false or misleading information to the Water Authority is also an offence with a maximum penalty of a \$25,000 fine and six months' imprisonment.

The WSD spokesman strongly appealed to landlords to apply for the installation of separate water meters for their SDUs, which can greatly reduce the risk of contravening the amended WWO. The water fee deposit and the charge for providing a meter for each separate meter installed under the Scheme for Installation of Separate Water Meters for Subdivided Units will be waived. Individual water bills will be provided for each water meter account. The first 12 cubic metres of water are free at four-month intervals. SDU tenants can contact the WSD to request separate water meters. Upon receiving such requests, the WSD will contact the landlords for the installation of separate meters. If the landlords refuse, the WSD may require them to provide information on the recovery of water charges from their tenants in suspected overcharging cases. Details of the scheme can be obtained from the WSD website

(www.wsd.gov.hk/en/customer-services/application-for-water-supply/pilot-scheme-for-installation-of-separate-water-me/index.html).

The WSD encourages the public to report any illegal act of overcharging SDU tenants for water for follow-up and investigation by the department. The public can call the WSD Hotline 3468 4963 or WhatsApp 5665 5517 to apply for the installation of separate water meters for SDUs. The WhatsApp hotline also handles matters relating to water overcharging in SDUs. Alternatively, the

public can call the WSD Customer Enquiry Hotline 2824 5000 to report water overcharge cases. After calling the hotline and choosing a language, they can press "7" for reporting to staff directly.