

Housing Authority's Rent Assistance Scheme for tenants with temporary financial difficulties

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Housing Authority:

The Rent Assistance Scheme (RAS) of Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) provides relief in the form of rent reductions to public rental housing (PRH) tenants who are facing temporary financial hardship. Under this scheme, eligible elderly households will be granted 50 per cent rent reduction whereas eligible non-elderly households will be granted 50 per cent or 25 per cent rent reduction.

At present (as at end of July) about 17 680 PRH households (2 per cent of the total PRH households in Hong Kong) benefit from the scheme, meaning an increase of 870 beneficiaries as compared with the same period last year.

Among the beneficiaries, 10 920 of them are elderly receiving a 50 per cent rent reduction. As for the remaining 6 760 non-elderly households, 5 630 of them were granted 50 per cent rent reduction and 1 130 granted 25 per cent rent reduction.

"Although the existing PRH rent adjustment mechanism has ensured PRH households' ability to afford the rent, individual tenants may face temporary financial hardship due to various situations. In 2017-18, the Housing Authority's expenses in RAS reached \$152 million," a spokesman for the Housing Department (HD) said today (September 2).

In the past, the HA has relaxed the eligibility criteria for applying for RAS several times in response to the demand of tenants and the socio-economic situation. This included relaxing the eligibility criteria for elderly households, households affected by redevelopment and non-elderly households; granting rent assistance to all successful applicants with retrospective effect from the first day of the month of the application, and reducing the frequency of review of RAS eligibility from once every year to once every two years, so that tenants with short-term financial difficulties can obtain assistance in a timely manner.

After receiving rent assistance for four consecutive years, non-elderly RAS recipients living in newer blocks in need of further assistance will be required to move to appropriate cheaper accommodation. Elderly households, households with disabled members and all RAS beneficiaries living in older block types are exempted from such a requirement. RAS beneficiaries moving to cheaper accommodation will also be entitled to receive a Domestic Removal Allowance and enjoy a rent-free period of one month under the new tenancy.

Apart from intensifying publicity about the RAS, the HD also implemented

the following measures to provide assistance to applicants:

(a) estate staff to adopt a caring and proactive approach in reaching out to tenants in need, in particular the elderly and single parent families, during home visits;

(b) solicit assistance from non-government organisations, local District Council members and Estate Management Advisory Committee members to refer tenants in need to estate offices for RAS application;

(c) upon receipt of enquiries on RAS, estate staff will explain to applicants details of the policy, eligibility criteria, procedures and the types of supporting documents required for vetting; and

(d) estate staff will also explain and provide assistance to tenants, in particular the elderly, who may have difficulties in understanding the application form.

"HD staff are always prepared to assist tenants in applying for RAS, particularly households with elderly and disabled family members. We will also provide outreaching services when necessary," the spokesman said.

Polishing talent with higher training

Three Immigration Department training programmes have been successfully accredited under the Qualifications Framework and are giving a new sense of direction to its officers' careers.

News.gov.hk interviewed Immigration Service Institute of Training & Development Commandant Eric Cheung and two Immigration Assistant grade officers to see how the programmes help boost the department's services.

The story appears on news.gov.hk today (September 2) in text and video format.

Red flag hoisted at Clear Water Bay Second Beach

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (September 2) that due to inclement weather, red flag has been hoisted at Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at the beach.

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Employers, contractors and employees should be aware of electrical safety at work during rainstorm

As the rainstorm warning has been issued by the Hong Kong Observatory, the Labour Department (LD) reminds employers and contractors that they should adopt necessary work arrangements and take suitable safety measures to protect the safety of their employees when they are carrying out electrical work or handling electrical plant.

A spokesman for the LD said today (September 2) that employers and contractors should avoid assigning employees to carry out electrical work (like electric arc welding work) or handle electrical plant at places affected by rainstorms, and should refer to the "Code of Practice in times of Typhoons and Rainstorms" and the "Guide on Safety at Work in times of Inclement Weather" issued by the LD.

Even if electrical work is carried out or electrical plant is handled at places not affected by the rainstorm, suitable safety measures must still be

adopted to prevent electric shock as the air would be more humid. Such measures include:

(i) Ensure that all live parts of an electrical installation are isolated from the power supply source and rendered dead, and the isolation from the power supply source must be maintained as long as electrical work is being carried out;

(ii) Before carrying out any electrical work or handling any electrical plant, cut off and lock out the power supply source, then test the circuit concerned to confirm it is dead and display suitable warning notices, and issue a work permit thereafter;

(iii) Ensure that protective devices (such as suitable and adequate fuses and circuit breakers) for the electrical installations or electrical plant have been installed and maintained in good working order, and portable electric tools must be double-insulated or properly earthed;

(iv) Provide suitable personal protective equipment such as insulating gloves and insulating mats for employees; and

(v) If live electrical work is unavoidable, a comprehensive risk assessment should be conducted by a competent person and the appropriate safety precautions should be taken to remove or properly control the electrical hazards involved before such work can proceed.

In addition, employees should co-operate with the employer or contractor to follow the safety instructions and use the safety equipment provided.

The LD has published guidebooks and leaflets on electrical work safety. These safety publications are available free from divisional offices of the department or can be downloaded from its website (www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2_8.htm).

Should there be any questions about occupational safety and health matters, please contact the Occupational Safety Officer of the LD at 2559 2297.