

Government's response to media enquiries on the removal of two trees at Bonham Road in front of Tang Chi Ngong Building of the University of Hong Kong

In response to media enquiries on the removal of two large trees at Bonham Road in front of Tang Chi Ngong Building of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), a Government spokesman today (May 24) made the following statement:

The health and structure of the two Banyan trees on both sides of the slope entrance at Tang Chi Ngong Building in the HKU, Bonham Road, have shown signs of distress. The trunks were leaning towards the footpath along Bonham Road, impacting the structural integrity of the wall, which showed clear signs of deformation, cracking and leaning to the two trees. In view of deteriorating tree conditions, the Government removed the two Banyan trees on May 20.

Since mid-2015, the HKU, members of the Central and Western District Council (C&W DC) and local residents have expressed concern about the safety of the two trees. A professional arborist under the Lands Department's tree management contract conducts regular inspection and maintenance of the two trees every six months. The maintenance works included pruning to reduce the weight of the tree canopy and removal of fungal infected parts. In spite of this, the health condition of the trees did not improve. In December 2017, after detailed inspections and assessments, the professional arborist concluded that the health and structure of the two trees had continued to deteriorate, including leaning towards the footpath (Tree 1 (T1) and Tree 2 (T2) tilted at 30 and 15 degrees respectively), sparse foliage, relatively low live crown ratios, asymmetric crowns, and tree cavities (about 30 x 30 x 20 cm and about 50 x 30 x 20 cm for T1 and T2 respectively). The results of resistograph for T1 also confirmed decay at the tree cavity.

Moreover, the structure of the wall adjacent to the trees had been impacted by tree growth. The wall leans towards the footpath and road, with deformations and multiple cracks. The walls showed obvious signs of tilting towards Bonham Road, indicating danger of collapse. In a heavy rain event typical of Hong Kong, torrential rain can wash away the soil around the tree roots through the cracks on the walls. This will inevitably destabilise the trees and might lead to sudden collapse of both the destabilised trees and walls. Having regard to the above considerations, the trees had to be removed before the full onset of the wet season in the interest of public safety.

The Government understands that the public love and care for trees. In

the past two plus years, we have actively explored different options to retain the two trees as far as practicable, including installation of props to support the tree trunks. We have also studied the practicability of installing steel cables as proposed by the HKU. Due to limited space for anchorage, the leaning walls and its overall unstable structure, it would not be feasible for the walls to bear the pulling force of the steel cables. Moreover, as the roots of the trees are already wrapped around the walls, there is plausible risk of the walls and trees collapsing together. Therefore, installing the steel cables cannot reduce the risk of collapse of the two trees and the wall. In view of the heavy traffic and high pedestrian volume along the narrow Bonham Road, it is not appropriate to place large props to support the two trees which may be weighing several tons.

On April 26, the Tree Management Office of Development Bureau invited experts of the Urban Forestry Advisory Panel to conduct a field trip to stonewall and wall trees in Hong Kong, including the two trees on Bonham Road, and broached the proposal of tree removal. Panel members agreed that alternative measures to retain the trees were not practicable, and their removal is necessary in view of the danger they pose to public safety.

In consideration of the heavy traffic and high pedestrian volume on the narrow Bonham Road adjacent to the two trees, and recognising that the proposed mitigation measures might not be able to reduce the risk of the collapse of the two trees and walls, the Government proposed to remove the trees to protect public safety. The proposal was submitted to the Food, Environment, Hygiene & Works Committee (the FEHW Committee) of the C&W DC (http://www.districtcouncils.gov.hk/central/doc/2016_2019/tc/committee_meetings_doc/FEHWC/13792/20180517_FEHWC_Paper_39_2018_R1.pdf). The paper, which contains photos showing the defects of the trees, details the reasons for tree removal and provides the relevant tree assessment documentation. On May 17, the Government representatives also attended the meeting of the FEHW Committee to explain the proposal, as well as communicated with other stakeholders, including the HKU, nearby schools, and residents, etc. through various channels to explain the reasons of the proposed removal works, particularly the importance of protecting public safety.

There was comment that the lack of signs of decay in a cross-section of the tree stump indicated that the trees were still healthy. It should be noted that the decayed parts are below the cross-section. From the professional point of view, the health conditions of the trees are reflected by other signs, such as the sparse foliage and relatively low live crown ratio, etc. We must point out that the Government has considered various factors in deciding to remove the trees, including the stability of the trees and supporting wall, the health and structure of the trees, their location, utilisation of affected facilities, and the practicalities of alternative mitigation measures, etc.

The Government cherishes our trees, but is also mindful of the threats unhealthy trees may pose to life and property. Noting from past cases, tree failures are always sudden, and there is no way that pedestrians and vehicles can escape when tree failure occurs. Therefore, when a tree becomes an

overwhelming risk to the public, the Government is obliged to remove it to ensure public safety.

Missing woman in Ngau Tau Kok located

A woman who went missing in Ngau Tau Kok was located.

Cheung Sau-ying, aged 53, went missing after she left her residence in Tak Long Estate on May 22 morning. Her family made a report to Police on the same day.

The woman was located at the junction of Hong Tak Road and Kwun Tong Road today (May 24). She sustained no injuries and no suspicious circumstances were detected.

Appeal for information on missing man in Kwai Chung (with photo)

Police today (May 24) appealed to the public for information on a man who went missing in Kwai Chung.

Wong Man-chuk, aged 49, went missing after he left an elderly home on Shek Yam Road yesterday (May 23) afternoon. Staff of the elderly home made a report to Police on the same day.

He is about 1.74 metres tall, 75 kilograms in weight and of fat build. He has a round face with yellow complexion and short straight white hair. He was last seen wearing a T-shirt with green and white stripes, blue trousers and brown slippers.

Anyone who knows the whereabouts of the missing man or may have seen him is urged to contact the Regional Missing Person Unit of New Territories South on 3661 1176 or 6510 4630, or email to rmpu-nts-1@police.gov.hk, or contact any police station.



Labour Department highly concerned about fatal work accident today

The Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about the work accident that happened at a residential estate in Ho Man Tin today (May 24), in which a worker fell down from the top of a water tank on the roof of a building and sustained fatal injury. The LD is saddened by the death of the worker and has expressed its deepest sympathy to the victim's family.

The LD's spokesman said, "We commenced immediate on-site investigation as soon as we were notified of the accident and will issue suspension notices to the contractors/employer involved to suspend all work activities at the water tank concerned. The contractors/employer cannot resume the work process until the LD is satisfied that measures to abate the relevant risk have been taken."

The spokesman added, "We will complete investigation as soon as possible to identify the cause of the accident, ascertain the liability of the duty holders and recommend improvement measures. We will take actions pursuant to the law if there is any violation of the work safety legislation."

The general duty provisions of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance require employers to provide safe working environments, safe plant and safe systems of work for their employees. Those who contravene the above provisions are liable to a maximum fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for six months.

In regard to today's accident, the LD will issue a Work Safety Alert

through its website and email, giving a brief account of the accident concerned to duty holders, workers' unions, professional bodies of safety practitioners and others, and reminding the industry of the importance of following safety precautionary measures to prevent recurrence of similar accidents.

The LD will also remind the employer concerned of the liability for employees' compensation under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, assist family members of the deceased to claim employees' compensation and closely follow up on the case. For those with financial difficulties, the LD will assist them to apply for appropriate emergency funds. Subject to the needs and wishes of family members of the deceased, the LD will also liaise with the Social Welfare Department for financial or other assistance.

For the sake of securing the safety and health of employees at work, the LD appeals to employers to provide plant and systems of work that are safe and without risks to health. Employees should co-operate with their employers, adopt all safety measures and use personal protective equipment provided properly to avoid endangering their own work safety and that of other workers.

[Independent Review Committee on Hong Kong's Franchised Bus Service visits depots of franchised bus operators \(with photos\)](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Independent Review Committee on Hong Kong's Franchised Bus Service:

The Chairman of the Independent Review Committee on Hong Kong's Franchised Bus Service, Mr Justice Michael Lunn, and Members of the Committee Mr Rex Auyeung Pak-kuen and Professor Lo Hong-kam, visited the depots of New World First Bus Services Limited and Citybus Limited, two franchised bus operators, in Chai Wan today (May 24).

During the visit, Mr Justice Lunn, Mr Auyeung and Professor Lo sought to gain a better understanding of the operational management of franchised buses from the point of view of safety, including:

- daily checks and annual inspections of franchised buses to ensure their roadworthiness and safety;
- technical capabilities and use of tachographs and black boxes installed on franchised buses to monitor the driving behaviour of bus captains; and

- the deployment of the fleet of franchised buses by the 24-hour Operations Control Centre.

The Committee was appointed by the Chief Executive on March 13, 2018, following the fatal incident on Tai Po Road on February 10, 2018 and in light of other recent serious incidents involving franchised bus services, to conduct a comprehensive review of the operation and monitoring of franchised buses and to make recommendations on safety-related measures to ensure that franchised bus services in Hong Kong are safe and reliable.

