

Employers and employees should make prior work arrangements in times of tropical cyclones and rainstorms

As the Strong Wind Signal No. 3 (T3) is now in force, the Labour Department (LD) today (May 31) reminded employers to make prior work arrangements for employees during and after tropical cyclone warnings, rainstorm warnings and "extreme conditions", including arrangements on reporting for duty, release from work, resumption of work and remote work (if applicable). These arrangements not only can ensure the safety of employees and smooth operation of establishments, but also are conducive to maintaining good labour-management relations.

"In drawing up and implementing the work arrangements and contingency measures for periods during and after tropical cyclone warnings and rainstorm warnings, employers should give prime consideration to employees' safety and the feasibility of employees travelling to and from their workplaces. Employers should also give consideration as much as possible to the different situations faced by individual employees, such as their place of residence and the road and traffic conditions in the vicinity, and adopt a sympathetic and flexible approach with due regard to their actual difficulties and needs," an LD spokesman said.

To avoid misunderstanding, disputes and confusion, employers should consult and engage employees when drawing up the arrangements and make appropriate updates or amendments based on the experience of each occasion and the needs of both employers and employees, as well as the actual situations. The work arrangements should cover the following matters:

- * arrangements in respect of reporting for duty;
- * arrangements in respect of early release from work;
- * arrangements in respect of resumption of work (e.g. the number of hours within which employees should resume duty after the warning concerned is cancelled or when "extreme conditions" comes to an end, and when safety and traffic conditions allow);
- * arrangements in respect of remote work such as work from home (if applicable) (e.g. duty and work arrangements during and after tropical cyclone warnings, rainstorm warnings or "extreme conditions");
- * arrangements regarding working hours, wages and allowances (e.g. calculation of wages and allowances in respect of reporting for duty and absence); and
- * special arrangements in respect of staff required to report for duty in times of adverse weather and "extreme conditions".

"Employers should conduct a timely and realistic assessment of whether there is any need for requiring staff to report for duty at workplaces when a tropical cyclone warning, rainstorm warning or 'extreme conditions' is in

force. In making the assessment, employers should take into account the safety of employees, the business nature, operational needs and urgency of service, with due regard to the manpower requirements, staffing establishment and individual situations of employees, and keep the number of staff at workplaces to the minimum as far as possible," the spokesman added.

When a Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement is issued during working hours, employers should release employees from workplaces or from work in stages or arrange for them to work remotely as soon as practicable. To ensure the safety of employees and to enable them to arrive home before suspension of public transport services, employees who have mobility problems (for example, pregnant employees or those with a disability), employees who rely on transport services which are prone to being affected by adverse weather conditions (for example, ferry services) to get home, and those who work in or are living in remote areas (for example, outlying islands) should be given priority to leave. Other employees should be released from workplaces or from work in stages according to their travelling distance or the time required for returning home.

If an Amber, Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is issued during working hours, employees working indoors should continue to work as usual unless it is dangerous to do so. Supervisors of employees working outdoors or in exposed areas should suspend outdoor duties as soon as practicable. They should arrange for their employees to take shelter temporarily and resume duty only when weather conditions permit. If the Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is still in force by the end of working hours, employees should stay in a safe place until the heavy rain has passed. A suitable area in the workplace should be made available by employers as temporary shelter for employees.

If it is necessary for employees to report for duty at workplaces under adverse weather or "extreme conditions", employers should discuss and agree with them in advance on the duty arrangements and contingency measures. If public transport services are suspended or limited when Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 (T8) or higher, Black Rainstorm Warning Signal or "extreme conditions" is in force, employers should provide safe transport services for employees travelling to and from workplaces, or grant them an extra travelling allowance.

The spokesman also reminded employers to observe the statutory liabilities and requirements under the Employment Ordinance, Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance, Employees' Compensation Ordinance and Minimum Wage Ordinance.

"As natural calamities cannot be avoided, for employees who are not able to report for duty or resume work on time due to adverse weather or 'extreme conditions', employers should neither deduct their wages, good attendance bonuses or allowances, nor reduce employees' entitlement to annual leave, statutory holidays or rest days under the Employment Ordinance, or ask for additional hours of work from employees to compensate for the loss of working hours when they are unable to report for duty," he said.

Employers should note that they have an obligation to provide and maintain a safe working environment for their employees under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance. If employees are required to work in times of tropical cyclone warnings, rainstorm warnings or "extreme conditions", employers should ensure that the risks at work are reduced as far as reasonably practicable. Moreover, under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, employers are liable to pay compensation for injuries or deaths incurred when employees are travelling by a direct route from their residence to their workplace, or from their workplace back to their residence after work, four hours before or after working hours on a day when T8 or higher, a Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal or "extreme conditions" is in force.

The LD has published the "Code of Practice in Times of Adverse Weather and 'Extreme Conditions'", which provides the major principles, reference guidelines and information on relevant legislation on making work arrangements for the reference of employers and employees. The booklet can be obtained from branch offices of the Labour Relations Division or downloaded from the department's webpage (www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/Rainstorm.pdf).

Inaugural Chinese Culture Festival's **"Encountering Chinese Culture"** **carnival to be held in Sha Tin on June** **9**

The inaugural Chinese Culture Festival (CCF), organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), will hold the "Encountering Chinese Culture" carnival on the afternoon of June 9 (Sunday). Through an array of outdoor and indoor activities rich in Chinese culture characteristics, including stage performances, cultural booths, story-telling sessions, a Chinese music performance, an exhibition and a talk, members of the public will be able to experience the colourful Chinese culture and arts up close. Various activities will be held at the Plaza, Foyer, Exhibition Gallery and Lecture Room of Sha Tin Town Hall and the Entrance Arena at L1, Phase 1 of New Town Plaza. Members of the public are invited to join for free.

The carnival will kick off with a dragon and lion dance performance at 2pm at the Plaza of Sha Tin Town Hall, followed by a number of dance, drumming and magic performances by outstanding local and Mainland art groups. Performers from the Beijing Dance Drama and Opera will perform excerpts "Lantern Dance" and "Embroidery" from dance drama "Five Stars Rising in the East", which was the opening programme of this year's CCF, to present the

audience with dance pieces infused with the flavour of the Western regions and Chinese classical styles. Audience members can also preview highlighted excerpts from some of the festival's programmes, including the "Fun Ride with Big Beard – Dancing Poems 2.0" by Hong Kong Dance Company Children's and Youth Troupes, the "New Dance Rhythms with Chinese Quintessence" and the "Chinese Magical Arts' Wonder" performances that are collaborated with the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Hong Kong Member Association, as well as classic Shanxi Jiangzhou drum music presented by local arts group Refiner Drums.

The carnival will feature eight cultural booths and workshops covering a wide range of intangible cultural heritage items of traditional craftsmanship, including blown sugar technique, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese paper-cutting, guangcai (the Canton famille rose porcelain) making, Hong Kong cheongsam making and Cantonese opera headdress crafting. Members of the public can experience the joy of Chinese culture and arts by watching the demonstrations and joining the workshops. As the Dragon Boat Festival is approaching, the carnival will set up booths for paper folding of dragon boats and rice dumplings, as well as festive fragrant sachets making. Families are welcome to join to experience the Chinese festive atmosphere. For more information on the workshops, please visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/f_entertainment/programs_1744.html#tab_2_0.

To promote reading and traditional Chinese culture, the Hong Kong Public Libraries will arrange a Library-on-Wheels for the carnival with story ambassadors delivering classic stories related to Chinese culture to children. Books related to the theme of Chinese culture will also be displayed and available for the public to borrow on-site.

In addition, "Glowing Beauties – A Photo Exhibition on Ethnic Costumes" will be held from today (May 31) until the day of the carnival (June 9) at the Foyer and Exhibition Gallery of Sha Tin Town Hall. The exhibition features photos of the brocade armguard behind the dance drama "Five Stars Rising in the East" and costume photos of China's 56 ethnic groups. Members of the public can learn more about the distinctive cultural practices, costumes and traditional ways of life of each ethnic group. The Music Office trainees' ensemble will stage a Chinese instrumental performance at the foyer of Sha Tin Town Hall on the day of the carnival. "Talk on the Miao Embroidery and their Hidden Stories" will be held at 6pm at Lecture Room 1 of Sha Tin Town Hall when museum expert adviser Ms Lee Mei-yin will give a brief introduction on the history of the Miao and what she saw and heard in a Miao village. She will also introduce the embroidered shoulder straps in Miao style. Online preregistration for the talk is required on a first-come, first-served basis (www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/f_entertainment/programs_1744.html#tab_5_0).

For the venue and time of each carnival activity, please visit www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/encountering-chinese-culture.

The CCF, presented by the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and

organised by the LCSD's Chinese Culture Promotion Office, aims to enhance the public's appreciation of Chinese culture and cultivate citizens' national identity and cultural confidence. The inaugural CCF will be held from June to September. Through different performing arts programmes in various forms and related extension activities, including selected programmes of the Chinese Opera Festival, exemplary local arts projects recognised by the China National Arts Fund, performing arts programmes from arts and cultural organisations, film screenings, exhibitions, talks and more, the festival allows members of the public and visitors to experience the broad and profound Chinese culture with a view to promoting Chinese culture and patriotic education as well as enhancing national identity amongst the people of Hong Kong, making contributions to the steadfast and successful implementation of "one country, two systems". For details, please visit the CCF website www.ccf.gov.hk.

The LCSD has long been promoting Chinese history and culture through organising an array of programmes and activities to enable the public to learn more about the broad and profound Chinese culture. For more information, please visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/ccpo/index.html.

The carnival is one of the major activities for the LCSD Photo-taking and Video-shooting Competition. Members of the public are welcome to join. Please visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/ptvsc/index.html for more details.

Classes of kindergartens and some special schools are suspended

Attention TV and radio duty announcers:

Please broadcast the following special announcement by the Education Bureau concerning schools, and repeat it at suitable intervals:

As the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal no. 3 is now in force, classes of kindergartens, schools for children with physical disability and schools for children with intellectual disability are suspended today. These schools, however, should keep their premises open and implement contingency measures to look after arriving students. They should ensure that conditions are safe before allowing students to return home.

Police National Security Department continues enforcement action

The National Security Department of the Hong Kong Police Force arrested six women and a man on May 28 and 29, on suspicion of committing "Offences in Connection with Seditious Intention", contravening Section 24 of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance. After investigation, the woman who was arrested on May 29 was also suspected of committing the offence of "providing pecuniary or other financial assistance or property for the commission of secession by other persons", contravening Section 21 of the National Security Law. Investigation revealed that she supported fugitive Law Kwun-chung and other individuals through an online subscription platform, with money amounting to approximately \$140,000.

Among the arrested persons, one woman continued to be remanded in custody in Tai Lam Centre for Women, whereas another five women and one man have been released on bail.

Police reiterate that offences in connection with seditious intention are very serious crimes, with a maximum penalty of up to seven years' imprisonment.

Police remind the public that it is an offence for any person to incite, assist in, abet or provide pecuniary or other financial assistance or property to another person, by any means whatsoever (including through online platform), for committing offences endangering national security, and stress that Police will continue to take strict enforcement actions against such illegal acts and urge members of the public to abide by the law.

Provisional statistics of retail sales for April 2024

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (May 31).

The value of total retail sales in April 2024, provisionally estimated at \$29.6 billion, decreased by 14.7% compared with the same month in 2023. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in March 2024 decreased by 7.0% compared with a year earlier. For the first 4 months of 2024 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total retail sales decreased by 4.7% compared with the same period in 2023.

Of the total retail sales value in April 2024, online sales accounted

for 8.2%. The value of online retail sales in that month, provisionally estimated at \$2.4 billion, increased by 11.4% compared with the same month in 2023. The revised estimate of online retail sales in March 2024 decreased by 4.0% compared with a year earlier. For the first 4 months of 2024 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of online retail sales decreased by 5.8% compared with the same period in 2023.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in April 2024 decreased by 16.5% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in March 2024 decreased by 8.7% compared with a year earlier. For the first 4 months of 2024 taken together, the provisional estimate of the total retail sales decreased by 6.4% in volume compared with the same period in 2023.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing April 2024 with April 2023, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets decreased by 3.0%. This was followed by sales of other consumer goods not elsewhere classified (-13.2% in value); jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts (-28.7%); wearing apparel (-23.6%); medicines and cosmetics (-7.1%); food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (-12.2%); electrical goods and other consumer durable goods not elsewhere classified (-26.5%); commodities in department stores (-21.5%); fuels (-9.6%); furniture and fixtures (-23.0%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (-26.3%); books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (-4.5%); Chinese drugs and herbs (-25.1%); and optical shops (-23.1%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of motor vehicles and parts increased by 58.5% in April 2024 over a year earlier.

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales increased by 0.2% in the three months ending April 2024 compared with the preceding three-month period, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales decreased by 0.3%.

Commentary

A government spokesman said that the value of total retail sales declined notably in April from a year earlier, partly because the Easter holidays rendered the effects of the changing consumption pattern of residents more visible. A large number of residents made outbound trips during the Easter holidays. This not only affected their local consumption during their time away but also could have reduced consumption in the days before and after the trips. Besides, the unstable weather conditions in April this year, with higher-than-usual rainfall, also had some impact. The relatively high base of comparison, attributable to buoyant consumer sentiment in the same period last year supported by the return to normalcy after the pandemic and the Consumption Voucher Scheme, was also relevant.

Looking ahead, the spokesman added that the changing consumption

patterns of visitors and residents would continue to present challenges to the retail sector. Nevertheless, the revival of inbound tourism, rising employment earnings, and the recent stabilisation of asset markets would provide support. The Government's strenuous efforts to promote a mega event economy and boost market sentiment would also help. The Government will continue to monitor the situation.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures on value index and value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for March 2024 as well as the provisional figures for April 2024. The provisional figures on the value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet as well as the corresponding year-on-year changes for the first 4 months of 2024 taken together are also shown.

Table 2 presents the revised figures on value of online retail sales for March 2024 as well as the provisional figures for April 2024. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first 4 months of 2024 taken together are also shown.

Table 3 presents the revised figures on volume index of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for March 2024 as well as the provisional figures for April 2024. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first 4 months of 2024 taken together are also shown.

Table 4 shows the movements of the value and volume of total retail sales in terms of the year-on-year rate of change for a month compared with the same month in the preceding year based on the original series, and in terms of the rate of change for a three-month period compared with the preceding three-month period based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The classification of retail establishments follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

These retail sales statistics measure the sales receipts in respect of goods sold by local retail establishments and are primarily intended for gauging the short-term business performance of the local retail sector. Data on retail sales are collected from local retail establishments through the Monthly Survey of Retail Sales (MRS). Local retail establishments with and without physical shops are covered in MRS and their sales, both through conventional shops and online channels, are included in the retail sales statistics.

The retail sales statistics cover consumer spending on goods but not on services (such as those on housing, catering, medical care and health services, transport and communication, financial services, education and entertainment) which account for over 50% of the overall consumer spending. Moreover, they include spending on goods in Hong Kong by visitors but exclude

spending outside Hong Kong by Hong Kong residents. Hence they should not be regarded as indicators for measuring overall consumer spending.

Users interested in the trend of overall consumer spending should refer to the data series of private consumption expenditure (PCE), which is a major component of the Gross Domestic Product published at quarterly intervals. Compiled from a wide range of data sources, PCE covers consumer spending on both goods (including goods purchased from all channels) and services by Hong Kong residents whether locally or abroad. Please refer to the C&SD publication "Gross Domestic Product (Quarterly)" for more details.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey of Retail Sales". Users can browse and download this publication at the website of the C&SD

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080003&scode=530).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of C&SD (Tel: 3903 7400; email : mrs@censtatd.gov.hk).