

Two owners convicted of overcharging subdivided unit tenant for water

Two co-owners of a subdivided flat on Wing Lung Street, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon, were convicted today (July 3) of overcharging their subdivided unit (SDU) tenant for water, in contravention of regulation 47 of the Waterworks Regulations. The two co-owners each pleaded guilty to eight counts (i.e. total 16 counts) of offences at the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts and were fined \$1,000 for each contravention for a total fine of \$16,000.

This is the 20th similar conviction case since the first conviction in June 2022, with associated fines ranging from \$1,000 to \$16,000. This is also the fourth case convicted after enactment of the Waterworks (Amendment) Ordinance 2024 (the amended WWO) on April 19, 2024.

A spokesman for the Water Supplies Department (WSD) said that the amended WWO 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 agreement, receipt or payment record for water charges. 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 a maximum \$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 so as 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 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 water 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 raise their request for separate water meters. Upon receiving such requests, the WSD will contact their landlords for installation of the separate meters. If the landlords refuse, the WSD may require landlords to provide information on the recovery of water charges from their tenants for 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 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.