

**Views submitted by the Chairman of the Building Services Committee
Division of the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers
on the Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill (“the Bill”)**

1. The Bill requires the owners and occupiers to “maintain buildings’ fire safety construction and fire service installations in accordance with the standards prescribed in the building plans as approved by the authorities before the construction of the buildings”. How can it be ensured that the successive owners or occupiers can have access to information on the plans which were approved before the construction of the building and to ascertain whether such information is accurate?
2. The Bill proposes to implement a ten-year programme comprising two phases to improve fire safety in buildings with the year 1973 as the threshold. While such a proposal is understandable, we question whether the Administration has set the priority according to the urgency of safety measures needed. For instance, installations in non-domestic buildings should be upgraded before those in domestic buildings. Alternatively, during the ten-year period, building owners can be directed to employ authorized persons, such as registered professional engineers, to inspect the safety conditions of their buildings and report to the authorities on a regular basis until the necessary improvement works are completed.
3. One important point to note is how to ensure the upgraded fire service installations are always in good working order. In Hong Kong where few people are aware of the need for “public safety”, it is also important to develop an awareness and culture of safety in the community, as teaching the public to always keep the fire door shut alone is already a fundamental issue.
4. As regards the financial assistance, it is sensible to combine the Fire Safety Improvement Loan Scheme and the Building Safety Improvement Loan Scheme into a new loan scheme with a wider scope of coverage. Such a scheme should cover all items relating to building safety, such as the safety of power installation and supply, lifts, and so on.
5. Under clause 5(2) in Part II of the Bill, the authorities may serve on the owners of a building a fire safety direction which includes directions to the owners to provide the relevant connections or other forms of integration, and the owners are expected to co-operate with the authorities. But this smacks of oversimplification of the issue. The process has to be co-ordinated centrally, for instance, by the owners’ corporation, which needs to engage engineering personnel with the relevant technical know-how,

such as registered professional engineers (building services), to carry out the required works.

6. According to paragraph 8 of the Legislative Council Brief, there are about 9 000 buildings in Hong Kong that are in need of improvement. Are there any regulations on the maintenance of the upgraded installations and equipment? In view of the large number of the buildings, is it effective and economical to rely on the Fire Services Department and the Buildings Department to inspect the buildings and enforce the law, given that the two departments may need to deploy more and more staff on this in future? Can the inspection work be contracted out?
7. Has the Administration considered whether this improvement programme may lead to an oligopoly of the works by only a few registered fire services contractors?