

Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill

Administration's Response (1st part) to issues raised by Members at the Bills Committee meeting on 25 April 2001

The Director of Fire Services attended the 15th regular meeting between the Director of Home Affairs and Chairmen & Vice-Chairmen of 18 District Councils on 15.3.2001 and briefed participants of the Bill. Questions and views raised after the briefing are summarised at Appendix A.

Appendix A

2. In order to let members of the District Fire Safety Committees (DFSCs) have a better understanding of the contents of the Bill, Buildings Department (BD) and Fire Services Department (FSD) have been making arrangements to conduct joint briefings for the 18 DFSCs from March 2001 onwards.

3. During the "Questions and Answers" sessions after the briefings, members of DFSCs actively expressed their views and raised questions on the Bill. Representatives of BD and FSD had responded appropriately to the questions and concerns of members. For details of the progress of the briefing arrangements, as well as questions and views raised by DFSC members, please refer to Appendix B.

Appendix B

Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill

**Summary of Views and Questions raised during the Attendance of
the Director of Fire Services at
the 15th Regular Meeting between the Director of Home Affairs and
Chairmen & Vice-Chairmen of 18 District Councils
on 15 March 2001**

Summary of Views and Questions

- Is the Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill applicable to domestic buildings?
- What is the plan for enhancing fire safety standards of buildings and the time required for completion?
- Why is priority given to upgrade composite buildings?
- Is it possible to improve the fire safety standard of those relatively old buildings (domestic buildings) with priority upon the request of other government departments, e.g. Home Affairs Department?
- If owners of a building receive directions from other government departments requiring the building to be altered or re-developed after the commencement of the required fire safety improvement works, how will the Administration handle the improvement works that have already been made?
- Is it mandatory for the owners to employ professional experts to carry out improvement works on fire safety standards?
- Can the owners of domestic buildings take the initiative to require enhancement of the fire safety standard of their buildings?
- Regarding the financial aspect, how can the Government assist the owners who have financial difficulty in paying the cost of the works required?
- If the owners cannot afford to repay the loan, what measures will the Administration take?

Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill**Progress of Arrangements of
Briefings for District Fire Safety Committees**

	District	Date of Briefing	Summary of Views & Questions	Remarks
1	Sai Kung	14 March 2001	Annex A	
2	Eastern	11 April 2001	Annex B	
3	Wan Chai	25 April 2001	Annex C	
4	North	2 May 2001	Annex D	
5	Central & Western	9 May 2001	Annex E	
6	Sha Tin			Briefing scheduled for 14 May 2001
7	Shum Shui Po			Briefing scheduled for 15 May 2001
8	Kwun Tong			Briefing scheduled for 23 May 2001
9	Tai Po			Briefing scheduled for 24 May 2001
10	Kwai Ching			Briefing scheduled for 29 May 2001
11	Yuen Long			Briefing scheduled for 30 May 2001
12	Southern			Briefing scheduled for 7 June 2001
13	Tuen Mun			Briefing scheduled for 19 June 2001
14	Kowloon city			Arrangement being made
15	Islands			Arrangement being made
16	Tsuen Wan			Arrangement being made
17	Yau Tsim Mong			Arrangement being made
18	Wong Tai sin			Arrangement being made

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Sai Kung District Fire Safety Committee Summary of Views and Questions

Briefing Date : 14.3.2001 (1430 hours)

Summary of Views and Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is it necessary to employ professional experts to carry out improvement works of fire service installations in buildings?• There are some 5-storey buildings in the Sai Kung Old Town (namely those blocks for relocation of the Man Yee Wan Village) which do not have any fire service facilities, owners' corporations and building management. How can we resolve the problem?• If an owner possesses more than one property, can he/she apply for the loan?• As fire service installations are very expensive, can the Government intervene to discuss with fire service installations contractors in setting a reasonable price?

Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill

**Eastern District Fire Safety Committee
Summary of Views and Questions**

Briefing Date : 11.4.2001 (1430 hours)

Summary of Views and Questions

- In support of the introduction of Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill.
- Will 10 years be sufficient to handle the fire safety improvement of all the buildings in Hong Kong?
- Under the Bill, the enforcement authorities will require the owners/occupiers to provide fire service installations and equipment, and improve fire safety construction. What are the basis for setting such requirements?
- Enquiry on the requirements of smoke stop door and its purpose.
- Is it necessary to install emergency lighting system in ordinary domestic units?
- Will the enforcement authorities consider the request from owners of a building for early inspection to their building such that fire safety improvement works can commence earlier?
- Will the fire safety directions list out all the fire service installations and fire safety construction works that the owners/occupiers are required to provide?
- Will the enforcement authorities explain to affected owners the requirements of the fire safety improvement works?
- Can the Administration provide a set of standardized prices for fire safety improvement works?
- Is there sufficient professional experts or engineers in the market to cater for the sudden increase of fire safety improvement works?

Summary of Views and Questions

- How can the Administration assist those owners of a building where there is no owners' corporation in carrying out the fire safety improvement works?
- Do the two enforcement authorities work independently?
- How will the enforcement authorities provide one-stop shop service to the affected owners/occupiers?
- Has any consultation been made on the Bill? How will the Administration publicise the Bill?
- Through what channel can the public learn more about the requirements of the Bill?

Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill

**Wan Chai District Fire Safety Committee
Summary of Views and Questions**

Briefing Date : 25.4.2001 (1600 hours)

Summary of Views and Questions

- During law enforcement, how pragmatic and flexible will the enforcement authorities be in assisting those owners who may encounter difficulties?
- If the owners intend to install other fire service installations in place of those required by the law, is it a must for the owners to employ professional experts to submit the application on their behalf?
- Will the Fire Services Department provide enquiry service so as to suggest alternative proposals in place of the fire service installations specified in the Fire Safety Directions to the owners?
- Can arrangement be made for owners to visit those buildings in which the fire safety improvement works have been completed in accordance with the statutory building fire safety requirements?
- How will the Buildings Department handle the obstruction to escape route caused by the rear lane stalls or sidewall stalls?
- How is the width of the rear lane escape route prescribed?
- If the owners of a building are recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, is there any coordination between departments and how will the departments help them?
- How will the Government help those owners with financial difficulties to comply with the Fire Safety Directions?
- Will the Government offer low-interest or interest-free loan to assist those owners in difficulties?
- What are the details of the government loan scheme?
- How will the Government handle those owners who are not able to repay the loan due to financial difficulties?
- If the concerned owners are not able to repay the loan for a long period of time, what will be the charge of interest?

Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill

**North District Fire Safety Committee
Summary of Views and Questions**

Briefing Date : 2.5.2001 (1000 hours)

Summary of Views and Questions

- Indicated support of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill.
- During law enforcement, how pragmatic will the enforcement authorities be in handling difficult cases, e.g. if some buildings are not up to modern structural standards?
- If the owners encounter difficulties in installing new fire service water tanks, how flexible will the enforcement authorities be in handling such cases? Is it necessary to employ Authorized Persons to submit applications? How will the advisory committee handle such cases?
- It is hoped that the enforcement authorities will adopt a pragmatic and flexible approach in handling those cases with genuine difficulties.
- In respect of fireman's lifts, will the enforcement authorities require the concerned owners to install a new fireman's lift or improve the existing lift to comply with the current standard?
- In setting priority of inspections, those buildings with imminent danger and unauthorised building works, such as unauthorised structures or locked roof exits, should be given first priority.
- The Government should make it mandatory to establish owners' corporations in buildings.
- How can the Government assist in setting up owners' corporations in buildings?
- The owners' corporations should employ professional management companies to manage and maintain their buildings.
- After the establishment of an owners' corporation, if some owners are not

Summary of Views and Questions

willing to repay the loans, what assistance will the Administration render and how will the Administration handle such a case?

- If the owners have financial difficulty and need to apply for a loan from the Government, will the owners themselves or the owners' corporation be responsible for applying for the loan? Who will be responsible for repaying the loan?
- Is the amount of repayment based on individual units or the entire building as a whole?
- Most of the private building owners in North District are Chinese holding foreign passports or old people. They are law-abiding citizens. It is hoped that the enforcement authorities can flexibly handle those cases with difficulties. At the time of economic recession, it is hoped that the Government can set up a special committee for processing loan applications.
- It is hoped that the Government will cooperate with the private developers to re-develop the old and dilapidated buildings as it will be very difficult for these buildings to comply with the current fire safety standard.
- It is hoped that the Government can make new legislation to require the provision of at least one fire extinguisher in each domestic unit. It is because fire extinguishers can effectively tackle a fire at the initial stage, and even the elderly and children can operate them easily.

Fire Safety (Buildings) Bill

Central & Western District Fire Safety Committee Summary of Views and Questions

Briefing Date : 9.5.2001 (1030 hours)

Summary of Views and Questions

- Under the new legislation, what type of fire service installations that the occupier is required to provide?
- If the fire service installations or equipment is damaged or removed, the Fire Services Department will issue notices requiring the owners to rectify the irregularities. However, the new legislation will require the owners to improve the fire service installations or equipment. As such, will the enforcement authorities consider the issuance of a single notice requiring the owners to both rectify the irregularities and upgrade the fire service installations or equipment?
- Is there sufficient manpower in the enforcement authorities to handle 9,000 old buildings in the 10-year plan? Is there sufficient professional experts and engineers in the market to cater for the sudden increase of fire safety improvement works?
- Can the Administration stipulate that all new buildings should be of good ventilation design so as to avoid smoke stop doors from being kept open by occupants for ventilation purposes?
- Is the assistance to be rendered to the affected owners by the Administration adequate?
- How will the Administration assist those owners of a building, of which the ownership is diverse, to establish an owners' corporation and to raise the necessary funding?
- How will the Administration assist those cases with difficulties and those affected owners?
- Can the application procedures of the newly approved 'Comprehensive Building Safety Improvement Loan Scheme' be further simplified in order to make it more convenient for those owners who have financial problems

Summary of Views and Questions

to apply?

- Can the loan interest rate be further lowered so as to alleviate the burden on the owners?
- Will there be any exemption of interest under ‘Comprehensive Building Safety Improvement Loan Scheme’?
- Can the loan interest rate be lowered to the same as the saving interest rate?