

PLB(UR) 25/99/06 (01) Pt 6

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17 October 2001

Clerk to Panel  
(Attn : Mrs Queenie Yu)  
LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands and Works  
Legislative Council  
Legislative Council Building  
8 Jackson Road, Central  
Hong Kong

Dear Mrs Yu,

**LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands and Works**

**Issues raised at LegCo Members' meeting  
with Wan Chai District Council members on 5 July 2001**

Thank you for your letter of 26 September 2001.

2. As the issues raised in your letter fall within the responsibility of a number of bureaux and departments, we have consulted our colleagues in Security Bureau, Fire Services Department (FSD), Buildings Department (BD) and Home Affairs Department before responding to the points raised by LegCo/Wan Chai District Council (WCDC) members. A consolidated reply is set out below.

*Fire Safety Requirements for certain old commercial buildings which are now used as residential premises*

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3. One of the main concerns of members of WCDC is the fire safety requirements for approved commercial buildings now converted for residential purposes in Wan Chai. It should be appreciated that the Administration has an obligation to ensure that people living in older buildings, including the buildings in question, are offered adequate fire protection under the Fire Safety (Commercial Premises) Ordinance (Cap. 502).

4. As regards enforcement actions under the said Ordinance, it is incumbent upon officers from FSD and BD to carry out joint inspections prior to issuance of fire safety improvement directions. A flexible and pragmatic approach has been adopted in taking such actions. Of the 198 fire service installation plans examined in the past three years, FSD required less than 10% of them (17 cases) to be fitted with standard-sized water tanks for the automatic sprinkler systems. For the remaining 90% cases, alternative arrangements such as a sprinkler system with water fed either from existing fire hydrant/hose reel tank or from the town's main and smaller water tanks were accepted.

5. The enforcement departments undertake the same flexible, pragmatic approach in dealing with the current use of old commercial buildings for habitation purposes. FSD/BD officers will follow up with the owner/occupier concerned to render necessary assistance to facilitate compliance with the statutory requirements and resolution of any practical difficulties. An extension of time to comply with the direction may be given where appropriate. In some cases, FSD/BD may determine that not all of the statutory requirements (e.g. sprinkler system) need be implemented or that some other alternative measures should be implemented. In exercising such discretion, FSD/BD will have to take into account all relevant considerations, including the building conditions and designs, fire service installations and fire safety construction currently in place, the specific use of the premises, the fire load and the flow of people, and assess the fire risk involved. Each case will be considered on its own merits.

*Costs of the Fire Safety Requirements*

6. The Administration has always been mindful of the financial burden the fire safety requirements have on property owners. For this

reason, a Fire Safety Improvement Loan Scheme had been put in place to provide financial assistance to affected owners. To make the loan even more flexible and accessible, we have replaced the above scheme by a new Comprehensive Building Safety Improvement Loan Scheme which came into operation in July this year. The new scheme covers both fire and building safety. Eligible owners now have recourse to a non-means-tested loan at low interest rate for all required works to their premises. Those in hardship, e.g. the elderly and other persons with very low income, will also be offered extra assistance in the form of longer repayment terms and interest-free loans.

*Old Buildings included in the Urban Renewal Scheme*

7. BD and FSD have also been applying the flexible and pragmatic approach to buildings which are subject to redevelopment by the Urban Renewal Authority. The fire safety measures required are limited to those absolutely essential or are waived altogether with reference to the time remaining before actual demolition. Moreover, under the Urban Renewal Strategy, we will introduce a maintenance costs reimbursement scheme to remedy property owners' losses due to improvement works required by authorities.

8. I trust the above response will prove useful. Should there be any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

( Parrish Ng )  
for Secretary for Planning and Lands

c.c. Secretary for Security  
Director of Fire Services  
Director of Home Affairs  
Director of Buildings