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政府總部
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GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT
LOWER ALBERT ROAD
HONG KONG

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16 December 2004

Clerk to Panel on Security
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

(Attn: Mr. Raymond Lam)

Dear Mr. Lam,

Panel on Security
Provision of emergency assistance to hikers

At the Panel meeting on 10 June 2004, the Administration was requested to consider seeking sponsorship from enterprises for the installation of more Emergency Helplines in order to facilitate communication between hikers in distress and emergency rescue departments and report to the Panel in six months' time. Our response is set out below. We would also like to take this opportunity to report other measures that have been implemented or are being considered to help improve hiking safety.

Sponsorship for the Installation of Emergency Helplines

2. There are at present 102 Emergency Helplines and 100 payphones installed at various locations in or near the country parks to facilitate hikers in distress in seeking assistance from emergency rescue departments. 45 additional Emergency Helplines can be found at other locations frequented by hikers, such as Lugard Road Walkway at the Peak, juncture of Wanchai Gap Road and Bowen Road, and the main entrance of Lion Rock Park at Beacon Hill etc.

3. To further improve the coverage of Emergency Helplines, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), having taken into account suggestions of some hikers' groups and District Councils, has identified a number of sites for installing more Emergency Helplines. AFCD and the Office of the Telecommunications Authority have invited enterprises, fixed network telecommunications operators and community service groups to sponsor the initial costs of installing such lines and will offer proper recognition for the sponsorship. A response is awaited.

Other measures to improve communication between hikers and emergency rescue departments

4. Mobile base stations are installed to improve coverage of mobile phone networks. We reported to the Panel in June 2004 that there were a total of six mobile base stations in country parks and two new ones were being planned. Regarding the two mobile base stations under planning, the lead telecommunications operator of the proposed base station in Yuen Ng Fan, Sai Kung East Country Park, has signed a Short Term Tenancy (STT) for the site and submitted to the relevant government departments applications for carrying out the related works. The base station is expected to commence operation in the second half of 2005.

5. For the proposed mobile base station in Tsuen Kam Au, Tai Mo Shan Country Park, the lead telecommunications operator is working with other telecommunications operators in the joint development of the base station.

6. Apart from the above two new stations mentioned to the Panel in June 2004, a number of mobile phone operators have joined hands in developing a new base station at Woodside, Quarry Bay. When completed in March 2005, the base station will enhance mobile phone coverage in and near the Tai Tam and Quarry Bay Country Parks.

7. Apart from the efforts to encourage mobile phone operators to enhance their service coverage in country parks, we have also been exploring other options to improve communication between hikers in distress and emergency rescue departments. AFCD plans to conduct a trial scheme to test the feasibility of installing fixed satellite phones in country parks which will function as Emergency Helplines. Two sites in Sai Kung East Country Park have been selected for the trial scheme which is planned to commence in the second half of 2005.

8. Speedy location of hikers in distress is of paramount importance in rescue operations. Since June 2004, AFCD has set up over 1 600 new location identification plates (with grid reference) in country parks and hiking trails to facilitate hikers in identifying their locations, bringing the total number of such plates to about 2 470.

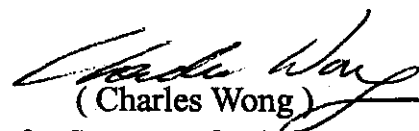
9. On 3 September 2004, the Police also started a pilot scheme of a comprehensive "Index for Signages in Country Parks in Hong Kong Island". The Index is a computer database that captures information of over 6000 signages set up by various Government departments and private organisations in the six country parks on Hong Kong Island, including, inter alia, their grid reference, location, local features of surrounding areas, access routes and cordon points. In case of an emergency, hikers may relay the relevant information on these signages to the 999 control centre and the control centre can cross-check the Index for speedy location of the hikers in distress.

Publicity and public education

10. We have also stepped up publicity and public education programmes to promote hiking safety. AFCD has produced a new "Announcement in the Public Interest" for broadcast since October 2004. The Department has also organized four seminars on countryside education and safety for over 600 school teachers of all levels since September 2004. An additional 50 000 leaflets on "Safety Hints for Hiking" have been distributed.

11. The Government will continue with our efforts to improve communication between hikers and emergency rescue departments and raise public awareness on hiking safety.

Yours sincerely


(Charles Wong)
for Secretary for Security

c.c.

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