

**For discussion
on 1 February 2005**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Removal of Bodies of Persons Found Dead in Public Places

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the existing arrangements for the removal of bodies of persons found dead in public places.

EXISTING ARRANGEMENTS

2. In the case when there is reported injured and/or apparently dead person, the Fire Services Department (FSD) will respond by sending out an ambulance. On arrival at the scene, the ambulance crew will conduct assessment and examination of the patient/casualty and provide appropriate treatments and pre-hospital patient care. Any injured person with signs of life will be delivered to the Accident and Emergency Department of the nearest hospital as quickly as possible.

3. Should the patient/casualty be found to be obviously dead after assessment and examination, the dead body will not be conveyed to hospital by the ambulance in attendance. It will be left at scene covered with a rubber sheet and be handed over to the Police for further investigation.

4. In general, police responsibilities at the scene in relation to the dead body are to conduct all necessary preliminary enquires in order to establish whether there are suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of the deceased, to collect and preserve evidence and to locate eye-witnesses to facilitate subsequent criminal investigation or death enquiry.

5. Depending on the nature of the case, the landscape of the

scene, the local conditions and as the immediate enquiries develop, the Police officer(s) at the scene would establish the necessary cordon and seal off the area/scene as appropriate to enable the preservation and gathering of evidence in connection with the case and to facilitate enquiries into it. As far as possible, the inconvenience and disturbance caused to the public will be kept to the minimum.

6. On completion of enquiries and actions at the scene, the Police will notify the dead removal team (DRT) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) to convey the dead body to a public mortuary. Under normal circumstances, FEHD staff can arrive at the scene in 30 to 60 minutes to remove the dead body after notification by the Police. The actual time required varies according to the location of the scene and the traffic conditions.

RECENT INCIDENTS

7. There has been public concern over the time taken to remove a dead body in a public place. The following paragraphs summarise the actions taken by relevant Government departments in three recent incidents.

Ka Wai Chuen in Kowloon City on 30.9.2004

8. According to Police records, at about 6:43 a.m., a passer-by made a 999 report on finding the deceased lying on the pavement outside Ka Yee Lau of Ka Wai Chuen. The deceased was confirmed dead by the FSD ambulance crew who arrived at the scene. Between 6:55 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. the Police conducted the following local enquiries:

- visually checking the body of the deceased;
- conducting enquiries at the scene;
- conducting enquires at Ka Yee Lau; and
- conducting enquires at the home of the deceased.

At about 8:00 a.m., the deceased's wife returned home and assisted in Police enquiries, after which it was believed that the deceased jumped

from his home, and no suspicious circumstances were detected.

9. According to FEHD records, the Duty Room at the Kowloon region received the report from the Police at 8 a.m.. The DRT arrived at the scene at 8:15 a.m. and removed the dead body.

Perfect Mount Garden in Shaukeiwan on 2.12.2004

10. According to Police records, a 999 report was made at 8:04 a.m. on discovery of the body of the deceased after a security guard had heard a loud noise. The ambulance crew who arrived at the scene confirmed that the person was dead, and covered the body before leaving. The Police then conducted the following local enquiries:

- visually checking the body of the deceased;
- conducting enquiries at the scene;
- conducting enquires at Perfect Mount Garden; and
- conducting enquiries at the home of the deceased.

The deceased's wife returned home at 8:45 a.m. and assisted in Police enquiries. The deceased's suicide note was subsequently found and it is believed that the deceased unscrewed the window bar of his bedroom and jumped out of the window. No suspicious circumstances were detected.

11. FEHD's Duty Room at the Hong Kong region received the report from the Police at 11:38 a.m.. As the DRT in the Hong Kong region was carrying out its duties in Mui Wo at that time, the officer on duty sought assistance from the Duty Room at the New Territories region. As the DRT serving the New Territories region was out on another assignment, the officer on duty then referred the case to the DRT of the Kowloon region. By that time, the staff of the DRT of the Kowloon region already left the office for lunch (the lunch break is from 12 noon to 1 p.m.). Upon the return of one staff member to the office at around 12:40 p.m., he immediately made efforts to assemble the other staff members to report for duty at the office. The DRT subsequently set off at 1 p.m. and arrived at the scene at 1:25 p.m., and removed the dead body.

12. According to FEHD's practice, if any report concerning removal of bodies of persons found dead in public places is received from the Police before the staff leave for their lunch break, the officer on duty will flexibly adjust the lunch break of the DRT so that the staff will complete their work before having lunch. This is an isolated case in the sense that the DRT of the concerned region was out on another assignment at the time and the time when FEHD received the report from the Police was very near to the lunch hour of the DRT. Extra time was therefore needed by the officer on duty to coordinate the assistance of another DRT from one of the other two regions, and later for the DRT in the Kowloon region to assemble the staff members to report for duty. As a result, staff could not be sent to the scene in the shortest possible time to remove the dead body.

Kwai Shing East Estate in Kwai Chung on 7.1.2005

13. According to Police records, a 999 report was made at 6:33 p.m.. The deceased was confirmed dead by the FSD ambulance crew who arrived at the scene. Between 6:50 p.m. and 9:20 p.m. the Police conducted the following local enquiries:

- visually checking the body of the deceased;
- conducting enquiries at the scene;
- conducting enquires at Shing Kwok House; and
- conducting enquires at the home of the deceased.

After investigations and with the assistance of the building management office, the wife of the deceased wife was contacted. She returned home at 9:20 p.m. and assisted in Police enquiries. No suspicious circumstances were found by the Police.

14. FEHD Duty Room at the New Territories region received the report from the Police at 9:38 p.m.. The DRT arrived at the scene at 9:58 p.m. and removed the dead body.

WAY FORWARD

15. The departments involved will continue to take prompt actions to complete the dead removal process within the shortest time possible without compromising the necessary investigations. Given the experience drawn from the recent cases, plan is now being actively pursued by the Police to provide officers at the scene with suitable shelters surrounding the dead body so that initial Police enquiries could be conducted within the area screened off until completion of the actions at scene prior to removal of the dead body by dead removal van.

16. On the part of FEHD, to ensure that all calls are dealt with promptly, there are internal guidelines stating that upon receipt of a call, the DRT should finish all the preparation work and start off to work within 10 minutes. The DRT should arrive at the scene as expeditiously as possible in order to shorten the time of exposure of the dead body in a public place. If the DRT is unable to arrive at the scene within a reasonable time, the officer in-charge of the DRT is required to record down the reasons.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
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