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30 October 2007

Clerk to Panel on Security
Legislative Council
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attn: Mrs. Sharon TONG)

Dear Mrs. Tong,

Alleged Taking of Alcoholic Drinks by Firemen on Duty

Thank you for your letter of 11 October 2007 requesting information on the alleged taking of alcoholic drinks by firemen on duty, as well as the findings of our investigation.

Social functions at Fire Stations during Traditional Festivals

On the paramount condition that fire service operations must not be affected, the Fire Services Department (“the Department”) has an established arrangement to permit the holding of social functions at fire stations during traditional festivals such as the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Chinese New Year and the Winter Solstice so as to allow station firemen working on a 24-hour shift to share the festivity with their families and close friends. This notwithstanding, relevant guidelines are laid down in the Fire Services Department General Orders (“the General Orders”) to ensure that the operation of the fire stations and services will not be affected. All members¹ of the Department must follow strictly these guidelines which include, inter alia, the

¹ “Member” is defined under the Fire Services Ordinance (Cap. 95) (“the Ordinance”) as a person holding any rank in the Fire Services Department set out in the Sixth Schedule to the Ordinance (viz. disciplined staff in the Department).

restriction on the consumption of alcoholic drinks by a fireman whilst on duty.

Prohibition against the taking of alcoholic drinks while on duty

There are clear stipulations in the Fire Services Ordinance (Cap 95) ("the Ordinance") and the General Orders against the taking of alcoholic drinks by members of the Department. Paragraph 11 of the First Schedule of the Ordinance provides that any member who, "when on duty, or called upon for duty, is unfit for duty by reason of intoxicating drink taken", commits an offence against discipline. It is further stated in paragraphs 9-38 of the General Orders that "crew members of any fire appliance/ambulance/fireboat or Communication Centre are not permitted to drink any form of alcohol whilst on duty". Any member who violates the General Orders commits an offence against discipline.

Investigation findings of the case in question

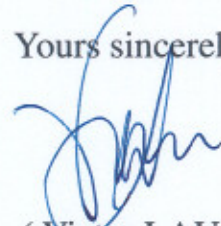
The Department takes the allegation about the taking of alcoholic drinks by some firemen at Po Lam Fire Station very seriously. With a media report showing a fireman holding a can of beer in uniform, the Department immediately set up an investigation team comprising members from two independent Operational Commands (viz., Hong Kong and the New Territories Fire Commands) to look into the case, with a view to determining if there has been any breach of the Ordinance and the General Orders.

The investigation team interviewed all personnel on duty at Po Lam Fire Station on 26 September 2007 and guests who took part in the gathering and were willing to assist in the investigation. One guest admitted that six cans of beer were brought to the gathering for personal consumption and for sharing with other guests. Another guest revealed that whilst taking part in a group game that required the use of her both hands, she had requested a fireman close-by to hold her can of beer for her at one point. In this connection, the investigation team noted that the media picture with a uniformed fireman holding a can of beer also showed a group of people playing the group game. The team found no evidence indicating that alcoholic beverages had been provided by the fire station, or consumed by any Fire Services member whilst on duty at Po Lam Station that day.

Follow-up action taken by the Department

In the light of the importance for the Fire Service to maintain full operational readiness, the Department has already issued a reminder to all its members on their obligation to adhere strictly to the stipulations of the Ordinance and the General Orders at all times. Furthermore, the Department has decided to further tighten the General Orders to the effect that no alcoholic drinks will be allowed in any social functions held in fire stations or ambulance depots in the future.

Yours sincerely,



(Victor LAU)

for Secretary for Security