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Panel on Security

**Information note prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 3 March 2009**

**Replacement of Radio Communications System
of the Fire Services Department**

Although the replacement of the radio communications system of the Fire Services Department (FSD) has not been discussed by the Legislative Council, the Director of Fire Services (DFS) had, in his speech delivered on 23 January 2009 at FSD's 2008 Year-end Review, announced FSD's plans in the year ahead, among which was the replacement of the department's radio communications system. DFS said that the trunked radio system had been in use for over a decade by FSD. Although the system was in normal working order, FSD had commissioned the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) to study the need for replacing FSD's radio communications system in view of the ever-increasing maintenance fee in recent years and the continuous advancement in communications technology in the market. The report of EMSD recommended that the analogue-mode trunked radio system currently in use should be replaced by a digital one to enhance the voice quality and communications capabilities. The relevant press release issued by the Administration is in the **Appendix**.

2. The Administration will brief the Panel on the details of its proposal to replace the radio communications system of FSD at the Panel meeting on 3 March 2009.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
25 February 2009

Press Releases

Fire Services Department's 2008 year-end review

Following is the speech by the Director of Fire Services, Mr Lo Chun-hung, at the department's 2008 year-end review today (January 23):

The year 2008 marked the 140th anniversary of the Fire Services Department (FSD). It was also a year of challenges. However, with our service members' professionalism, perseverance and dedication, we overcame the challenges one by one and continued to provide quality fire-fighting, rescue, fire prevention and ambulance services to the community.

Fire-fighting and Rescue Service

In 2008, there were a total of 35,513 fire calls, representing an increase of 12% (3,875 calls) against 31,638 in 2007. Also, the number of No.3 or above alarm fires increased from eight in 2007 to 18 last year.

Last year, 94.7% of building fires were handled within the graded response time, which is 2.2% higher than our performance pledge to achieve this time in 92.5% of building fires.

Last year, there were six fatal fire incidents, claiming a total of eight lives. In addition, 371 persons were injured in fires, and 3,241 rescued. A sad case was the No.5 alarm fire at Cornwall Court on August 10, 2008, in which two frontline fire personnel, Senior Fireman Siu Wing-fong and Fireman Chan Siu-lung, gallantly lost their lives in the course of fire fighting and rescue. Their bravery, dedication and selflessness are held in high regard among our colleagues and members of the public.

The total number of special service calls was 24,398, representing an increase of 10.5% (2,315 cases) against 22,083 in 2007. One notable incident was the sinking of a tugboat on March 22 last year. A Ukrainian tugboat with 25 crew members on board sank and overturned east of Brothers Island after colliding with a cargo vessel. The difficulties of rescue operation were intensified by the extremely unfavourable conditions such as swift currents, low visibility, water depth reaching 37 metres and the overturned cabin of the tugboat. Fire Services divers conducted 55 search and rescue operations continuously for eight days, exemplifying their outstanding bravery and excellent professionalism.

In addition to the challenges associated with the normal duties of fire-fighting and response to special service calls, frontline fire personnel in various districts have taken up the work of first responders, fire hazard inspections, fire service installation inspections, licence compliance inspections and community education on fire prevention. A total of 40,719 counts of first responder service were rendered by frontline fire personnel last year and 30,169 patients/casualties were treated. Among them, 38 who had appeared to have no breath or pulse were resuscitated.

We have continued to step up publicity and education on the prevention of hill fires. Fire Safety Ambassadors (FSA) from different districts worked with green groups in launching the Zero Hill Fire Scheme. Under the scheme, an award would be given to a participating village if it achieved zero fires during

Ching Ming Festival or Chung Yeung Festival. During the Ching Ming Festival, 195 out of the 197 participating villages of the scheme managed to hit the target of 'Zero Hill Fire'; while at the Chung Yeung Festival, 252 villages participated in the scheme and only two of them did not hit the target of 'Zero Hill Fire'.

A series of calamitous earthquakes measuring as high as eight on the Richter scale hit Wenchuan, Sichuan, on May 12, 2008. The areas were catastrophically ruined and the destruction was vast, with countless fatalities and casualties. The ruined areas afforded no delay in rescue. A Special Search and Rescue Team comprising 43 voluntary members was immediately set up by the HKSAR government. The team went to Sichuan in two groups to carry out on-spot search and rescue. Team members worked under extremely dangerous and adverse conditions with severe aftershocks happening from time to time. However, with their strong commitment and unswerving determination, a total of 24 bodies were extricated from the rubble. Their professionalism was met with wide public acclaim.

Fire Protection

In line with the increasing public demand for fire safety, the department has made efforts in further strengthening its work in this respect.

As regards the enforcement of fire protection, we conducted a total of 190,296 inspections last year, which included inspections of fire services installations, food premises, schools, child care centres, places of public entertainment, drug treatment centres, fire escapes and ventilation systems. We also handled complaints about dangerous goods.

After the No. 5 alarm fire at Cornwall Court in Mong Kok, the Government set up an Inter-departmental Task Group led by Security Bureau, consisting members from the FSD, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Home Affairs Department and Buildings Department. The task group conducted inspections of all karaoke establishments set up in commercial or composite buildings since August 18 last year and the inspections were completed on October 8. During the period, a total of 303 karaoke establishments inside 224 buildings were inspected, and a total of 48 warning letters and 188 Fire Hazard Abatement Notices (FHANs) relating to damage of fire services installations were issued. The karaoke establishments concerned have complied with the FHANs and warning letters. In addition, the department has instituted three prosecutions on the obstruction of fire escapes and the cases are still underway.

To further enhance the fire safety of old composite buildings, we set up a Special Enforcement Unit (SEU) comprising 17 fire personnel on October 2 last year. The SEU actively conducts inspections of old buildings and takes necessary enforcement actions against any irregularities detected. A total of 117 buildings have been inspected with 54 FHANs and 37 warning letters issued since the establishment of the SEU.

Since the implementation of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap 572) on July 1, 2007, FSD and the Buildings Department have jointly inspected 1,394 composite buildings or domestic buildings, and issued a total of 19,002 Fire Safety Directions.

We have continued to collaborate with the community in promoting the culture of fire safety. To this end, the FSA Scheme and FSA Honorary President Associations have operated

successfully for many years. As at the end of last year, the number of FSAs and FSA Honorary Presidents reached 96,324 and 278 respectively. On top of our own fire prevention campaigns, we are also very grateful that the associations and District Fire Safety Committees made great efforts in organising fire safety carnivals and other fire prevention activities in their own districts, so that the message of fire safety can reach every corner of the community.

To enhance public concern for the buildings in which they live or work and to encourage public implementation of building fire safety measures, a Building Fire Safety Envoy Scheme has been on trial since the end of 2008. The duties of envoys include disseminating fire safety messages to occupants of their buildings; assisting in organising fire drills; ensuring that the fire services installations of the building are subject to proper annual checking, and inspecting and reporting fire hazards or irregularities. Under the scheme, training courses are provided to staff of property management companies and owners or occupiers of buildings, so as to enhance fire safety standards.

Ambulance Service

In 2008, the department received 643,611 ambulance calls, representing a daily average of 1,763 calls, an increase of 5.2% (31,904 calls) compared with 2007. We achieved our target response time of 12 minutes in 92.2% of cases.

Last year saw a number of ambulance breakdowns due to the ageing fleet. As a department that provides emergency ambulance services, we have adopted a series of measures together with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) to improve vehicle reliability and speed up the replacement of the aged ambulances. The Government has allocated \$240 million for replacing a total of 196 aged ambulances in batches. Of these new vehicles, the first 100 will be put into service in 2009, with the remaining 96 becoming available in 2010. After all the 196 ambulances have been put into service, 80% of our ambulances will be under the age of two years.

The department has run the Heart Saver Scheme since 2007. With favourable public support, we have provided training on the use of public access defibrillators to staff of a number of organisations in various sectors, including property management companies, hotels, elderly homes, government premises, the Hong Kong International Airport and MTR Corporation. At the end of 2008, a total of 2,506 qualified persons were appointed heart savers. The scheme was proved to work shortly after its introduction. On April 5, 2008, a heart saver from the property management company of Grand Century Place in Mong Kok successfully revived a patient who had gone into cardiac arrest in the shopping arcade through cardiopulmonary resuscitation and electric shock with the help of a public access defibrillator. The department has commended the heart saver for his exceptional courage and enthusiasm.

Plans in the Year Ahead

To further enhance the safety standards of the breathing apparatus (BA) used by frontline staff, we shall shortly introduce a brand new breathing apparatus which features electronic personal monitoring system for displaying, monitoring and recording condition status.

The trunked radio system has been in use for over a decade by the department. Though the system is in normal working

order, the department commissioned the EMSD to study the replacement of the existing radio system a year ago because of the ever-increasing maintenance fee in recent years and the continuous advancement in communications technology in the market. The study report recommends that the analogue-mode trunked radio system currently in use should be replaced by a digital one to enhance voice quality and communications capabilities. In this connection, we shall seek funding from the Government to replace the system.

Meanwhile, we keep up our efforts in reviewing and identifying more quality tools and equipment to cope with our needs. Our target is to procure products which excel in efficiency, safety standards and quality.

The consultancy report on the Medical Priority Despatch System has been completed. After detailed examination of the report, the Security Bureau and the department will consider conducting a public consultation on the implementation of the system. It is hoped that a consensus can be reached among our staff and the public to implement the system which will further enhance the quality of emergency ambulance service.

As regards paramedic ambulance service, we are developing a computer-aided 'Quality Assurance System' to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the quality assurance program. The system is characterised by the automatic data retrieval function by which service quality will be monitored. The system is expected to operate by the end of 2009.

To better equip ourselves for possible incidents occurring in the control point areas, we are planning to conduct joint drilling exercises with the Fire Protection Office of the Shenzhen Public Safety Bureau in both Shenzhen and Hong Kong to step up co-operation.

In respect of diving training, a diving base on Stonecutters Island will be completed in March 2009. The four-storey training centre, which costs \$140 million, will cover a gross floor area of 5,500 square metres and provide a safer environment with advanced equipment for Fire Services diving personnel to conduct professional diving training. Upon operation of the base, the rescue efficiency and safety standards of diving personnel will be augmented.

We recruited 420 Fire and Ambulance personnel in 2008-09, including 67 Station Officers, 11 Ambulance Officers, two Station Officers (Control), six Senior Firemen (Control), 188 Firemen and 146 Ambulancemen to fill vacancies and meet service demand. We shall continue to conduct recruitment exercises to fill expected vacancies arising from natural wastage and newly created posts in 2009-10.

All along we have adhered to the principle of serving the community with full dedication and professional excellence. Last week, we were honoured to have received the Silver Award in the '2008 Customer Service Excellence Award Programme' organised by the Hong Kong Association for Customer Service Excellence. This is strong proof that our efforts have gained great social recognition. However, there is absolutely no room for complacency. We shall look for continual advancement and keep up our unrelenting professionalism to provide quality emergency services to the community in the future.

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