

**For Information
on 27 October 2008**

**Legislative Council
Panel on Security**

Replacement of Emergency Ambulances

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the Administration's plan for the replacement of emergency ambulances and the proposal to improve their reliability.

Background

2. The Fire Services Department (FSD) is responsible for providing emergency conveyance for any person who needs urgent medical attention in a hospital and for providing necessary pre-hospital care. The existing performance pledge is to handle 92.5% of all emergency calls within 12 minutes from the time of call.

3. In the first nine months of 2008, FSD received a total of 453 195 emergency ambulance calls, or 1 660 calls per day on average. The response time performance¹ achieved by the Department in this period was 91.9%.

Ambulance Fleet

4. At present, FSD operates a fleet of around 250 ambulances for its emergency ambulance service. The average age of these vehicles is 8.4 years. A breakdown by vehicle age is provided at Annex. Established arrangements for maintenance and replacement are in place to ensure their effective operation.

¹ The response time performance is the percentage of calls successfully handled within the 12 minute target time.

Maintenance

5. FSD has engaged the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) to provide maintenance service for its ambulances. The services provided include both preventive and corrective maintenance.

6. Preventive maintenance is a schedule of planned maintenance actions aimed at the prevention of breakdowns and failures. Preventive maintenance include equipment checks, partial or complete overhauls at specified periods, oil changes, lubrication and so on. Under the terms of the contract with EMSD, preventive maintenance on FSD's ambulances was carried out three times a year until 29 July 2008 when EMSD undertook to enhance it to four times a year at no additional cost to FSD starting from September 2008.

7. Apart from scheduled preventive maintenance, EMSD also performs corrective maintenance on ambulances, as and when necessary to repair or replace components which have failed or broken down. According to EMSD's records, the number of corrective maintenance in the first nine months of 2006, 2007 and 2008 was 711, 760 and 680 respectively. FSD's response time performance for emergency calls in the corresponding period of the three years was 92.6%, 92.4% and 91.9%.

8. Generally speaking, there are more incidents of ambulance breakdown in the summer months from July to September. This can be attributed mainly to the adverse effect of the heat and humidity on battery life, and on the wear and tear of air-conditioner components and engine belts. The number of corrective maintenance this summer is generally comparable to the figures in the past three years. This is particularly the case after EMSD has performed a round of special inspection on the whole fleet of ambulances at the end of July 2008. Where necessary, batteries, air-conditioner components and engine belts were replaced immediately. As a result, there was considerable improvement in the reliability of ambulances in August and September 2008.

Replacement

9. The Administration has replaced ambulances in accordance with the resource allocation mechanism over the years. According to the advice of EMSD, the economic service life of an ambulance is normally

seven years. This serves as a general guide for shortlisting a vehicle for possible replacement. EMSD and the Government Logistics Department (GLD) should take account of other essential factors in deciding on the replacement timetable. These include the actual working condition of the vehicle shortlisted, the vehicle's age, cumulative mileage, maintenance history, etc.

10. In addition to earlier funding allocation to replace 123 ambulances starting from December 2008 at an estimated expenditure of \$147 million, FSD is given an additional \$97 million in this year's resource allocation exercise for the replacement of 73 ambulances. Therefore, FSD will replace a total of 196 ambulances which account for nearly 80% of the existing fleet. We expect that the first 100 new vehicles will enter service before the end of 2009, and the remaining 96 vehicles will be available in the first half of 2010. By the time all these new vehicles arrive, the average age of FSD's ambulance fleet will drop to 1.7 years, as compared to the current average of 8.4 years.

Further Measures to Improve Ambulance Reliability

11. The reliability of the ambulance fleet will be greatly enhanced by the above massive replacement programme. To make further improvement, FSD and EMSD have increased the frequency of scheduled maintenance on all ambulances to four times a year effective from September 2008. In addition, FSD staff will enhance their 'user monitoring' on the operation and maintenance of the ambulance fleet, so as to ensure more efficient and effective deployment of these vehicles. With these improvement measures, we will further enhance the reliability of the ambulance fleet and as a result better emergency ambulance service to the community.

Advice Sought

12. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Security Bureau
Fire Services Department
October 2008**

Annex

Breakdown of the ambulance fleet by vehicle age

Vehicle Age	Number of Ambulances (percentage)
2 to 4 years	36 (14.3%)
4 to 6 years	23 (9.1%)
6 to 8 years	10 (4%)
8 to 10 years	114 (45.2%)
10 years and above	69 (27.4%)