

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Security

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 27 October 2008**

Emergency ambulance service

Purpose

This paper summarises the areas of concern raised by Members on emergency ambulances and the performance indicator for emergency ambulance service (EAS).

Adequacy and problem of ageing of emergency ambulances

2. In the course of examining the Estimates of Expenditure for 2008-2009, some Members expressed concern about the shortage of ambulances and the problem of ageing of ambulances. They enquired about the number of additional ambulances the Fire Services Department (FSD) had planned to procure in 2008-2009 and the criteria for allocating the additional ambulances to various districts.
3. According to the Administration's reply and information provided in the 2007 Year-end Review of FSD, there were 241 ambulances serving the urban area, with an average servicing period of 7.65 years. In 2008-2009, FSD would replace 35 ambulances which were oldest in the ambulance fleet. The replacement vehicles were expected to commence operation in batches before the end of 2008. In addition, FSD had earmarked additional funding for the replacement of 88 serving ambulances.
4. At the Council meeting on 21 May 2008, Hon LAU Kong-wah raised a question on emergency ambulances and the adequacy of EAS. The question and the Administration's reply are in **Appendix I**.
5. At a press briefing held on 29 July 2008, the Director of Fire Services advised that there were 64 emergency ambulances with a servicing period of over 10 years. This amounted to 26% of the emergency ambulance fleet. To strengthen the maintenance and repair of the aged emergency ambulances, which were carried out by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, consideration would be given to

shortening the maintenance intervals from four months to three months before the delivery of new vehicles.

6. At the Council meeting on 22 October 2008, Hon WONG Ting-kong raised a question about the measures taken by the Government to improve the reliability of emergency ambulances and the Administration's plan to replace emergency ambulances. The question and the Administration's reply are in **Appendix II**.

Performance indicator for emergency ambulance service

7. In 1986, a consultancy study was conducted on the provision of ambulance services in Hong Kong. The consultancy study recommended, inter alia, that a 10-minute target travel time should be achieved for 95% of emergency calls. This recommendation was endorsed by the Executive Council in 1987 and had since been used as the basis for the development of EAS.

8. In September 1998, the Executive Council further endorsed a recommendation for FSD to adopt a 12-minute response time as its performance target to replace the 10-minute travel time target. Commencing on 1 November 1998, FSD implemented a performance pledge of responding to at least 92.5% of emergency ambulance calls within a response time of 12 minutes, which comprised an activation time of two minutes and a travel time of 10 minutes.

9. Members had all along been concerned about the response time performance (RTP) of EAS. The Panel on Security and the Subcommittee on Emergency Ambulance Service formed under the Panel in 2000 had discussed the provision of EAS at a number of meetings.

10. According to statistics provided by the Administration in June 2005, the number of emergency ambulance calls increased from 459 658 to 536 359 in the five-year period from 2000 to 2004. This represented an increase of 16.7% (or an average annual growth rate of about 3.9%), and was higher than the 2.7% increase in Hong Kong's population in the same period. The RTP of EAS from 2000 to 2004 was as follows –

<u>Year</u>	<u>RTP</u>
2000	92.7%
2001	91.8%
2002	91.8%
2003	93.2%
2004	91.1%

Noting the gap with the performance pledge of FSD, Members enquired about the measures taken by the Administration to cope with the increasing demand for EAS and to improve RTP.

11. The Administration advised that to improve the response time for EAS and strengthen the service coverage, FSD had introduced a series of improvement measures. These included the introduction of the Third Generation Mobilizing System to enhance FSD's capability in the mobilisation of fire and ambulance resources for fire fighting and rescue operations, the implementation of staggered shift system in 17 ambulance depots which targeted ambulance resources at the peak hours in the evening, and the setting up of an Urgent Care Fleet which helped to release more resources for attending to emergency ambulance calls. The Urgent Care Fleet comprised 12 two-man crew ambulances which replaced the usual three-man crew ambulances and were tasked for the transfer of patients in critical conditions from one hospital or medical institution to another for emergency treatment or examination. As a result of the introduction of these improvement measures, RTP had improved and the overall service of FSD was able to meet its performance pledge in 2007.

Relevant papers

12. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix III**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
23 October 2008

Press Releases

LCQ12: Emergency ambulance service

Following is a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Ambrose S K Lee, to a question raised by the Hon Lau Kong-wah in the Legislative Council today (May 21):

Question:

Regarding the emergency ambulance service (EAS) of the Fire Services Department (FSD), will the Government inform this Council:

(a) among the ambulances deployed to provide the above service, of the respective numbers of those which were damaged, replaced or procured in the past five years, broken down by the divisions under the Ambulance Command of FSD, as well as the numbers of emergency ambulance calls received by various divisions in the same period;

(b) of the number of cases (except special cases involving incidents in remote rural areas), in each of the past five years, in which ambulances failed to arrive at the scene of incident within 12 minutes of receiving emergency ambulance calls, the districts with relatively higher ratio of such cases and the reasons for that, and whether the situation was related to the insufficient number of ambulances;

(c) of the number of times ambulances were deployed to provide cross-district EAS in the past five years; and

(d) whether the authorities have, on the basis of the above figures, assessed if the existing EAS is adequate?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The numbers of ambulances damaged, replaced and additionally acquired in the past five years, broken down by the divisions under the Ambulance Command, are as follows:

No. of ambulances damaged

Year	Hong Kong Division	Kowloon Division	New Territories East & West Division	New Territories South Division
2003	-	-	-	-
2004	2	-	1	-
2005	1	-	1	-
2006	-	1	-	-
2007	1	1	2	1

Total:	11			

No. of ambulances replaced

Year	Hong Kong Division	Kowloon Division	New Territories East & West Division	New Territories South Division
2003	-	-	-	-
2004	9	9	6	8
2005	2	-	6	4
2006	-	-	-	-
2007	-	-	-	-

Total: 44				

No. of ambulances additionally acquired

Year	Hong Kong Division	Kowloon Division	New Territories East & West Division	New Territories South Division
2003	-	-	-	-
2004	1	3	-	3
2005	-	3	-	1
2006	-	-	-	-
2007	-	-	-	-

Total: 11				

Note: As the Fire Services Department (FSD) will flexibly deploy its ambulances to ambulance depots in different districts in view of the actual demand for ambulance service, the above figures only indicate the division of the ambulances' base depots when they were damaged, replaced or acquired, but not the division of their current base depots.

The numbers of emergency ambulance calls in the past five years, broken down by call addresses, are as follows:

No. of emergency ambulance calls

Year	Hong Kong	Kowloon	New Territories	Total
2003	95,058	185,709	197,342	478,109
2004	103,590	209,715	223,054	536,359
2005	105,579	214,629	229,658	549,866
2006	103,248	211,780	224,875	539,903

2007 109,208 223,837 240,612 573,657

Note: FSD does not have the breakdown figures for the New Territories East & West Division and the New Territories South Division.

(b) Under the performance pledge of FSD, an ambulance will arrive at the street address of the scene within 12 minutes from the time of call for 92.5 per cent of all emergency ambulance calls. In the past five years, there were only a small number of emergency ambulance calls where the performance target of 12 minutes was not met. The detailed figures are as follows:

No. of emergency ambulance calls with response time exceeding 12 minutes

Year	Hong Kong	Kowloon	New Territories	Total
2003	4,634 (4.87%)	12,547 (6.76%)	14,393 (7.29%)	31,574 (6.60%)
2004	6,057 (5.85%)	19,494 (9.30%)	21,155 (9.48%)	46,706 (8.71%)
2005	7,605 (7.20%)	20,507 (9.55%)	28,893 (12.58%)	57,005 (10.37%)
2006	5,648 (5.47%)	12,613 (5.96%)	19,861 (8.83%)	38,122 (7.06%)
2007	6,646 (6.09%)	13,763 (6.15%)	19,988 (8.31%)	40,397 (7.04%)

Note: Figures in brackets are the ratios to the total number of emergency ambulance calls in the relevant district.

Response time is affected by many factors, including travelling distance, traffic and weather conditions, etc. According to our records, generally speaking, the percentage of calls in the New Territories with response time exceeding 12 minutes is slightly higher than those of the other regions. FSD believes that this is mainly due to the comparatively larger geographical coverage of the New Territories region and hence the longer travelling time required.

(c) With a view to providing the timeliest emergency ambulance service to the injured persons or patients, FSD's existing mobilising system will automatically identify and assign the ambulance that can reach the scene within the shortest time to attend to the call, without being restricted by the boundaries or districts of fire stations or ambulance depots. As a result, ambulances are required to travel to various districts of the territory to meet operational needs. In fact, when assigning the suitable ambulance, the mobilising system will only consider the real-time location of the ambulance and the time it will take to arrive at the street address. To improve the coverage and the response time of emergency ambulance service, FSD will flexibly deploy the ambulance resources of different districts and, if necessary, move up ambulances to other fire stations and ambulance depots as stand-bys having regard to the actual needs. As the operational area of an ambulance is not based on the location of its base depot, figures regarding cross-district

dispatch are not available.

(d) In 2007, the overall service of FSD has met its performance pledge. Ambulances can arrive at the scene within 12 minutes in slightly over 92.5 per cent of the emergency calls. Notwithstanding this, we will continue to make our best efforts to closely monitor the demand for emergency ambulance service. Apart from flexibly utilising our existing equipment and manpower, we will consider allocating additional resources where necessary.

Ends/Wednesday, May 21, 2008
Issued at HKT 18:50

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Press Releases

LCQ4: Replacement of ambulances

Following is a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Ambrose S K Lee, to a question by the Hon Wong Ting-kwong in the Legislative Council today (October 22):

Question:

It has been reported that over the past several months, there were a number of cases of ambulances breaking down while attending service calls. The situation has given rise to public concern whether emergency ambulance service has been delayed. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the number of cases of ambulances breaking down while attending service calls since January this year, how this number compares with the average number in each of the past three years, as well as the causes of such incidents;

(b) given that 35 and 88 new ambulances will be commissioned next month and next year respectively, of the expenditure involved, the criteria for determining the priority of ambulance replacement, and whether priority will be given to replacing ambulances with longer years of service and those which mainly serve districts of larger populations and bigger areas; and

(c) of the results of the inspections carried out by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department on all ambulances in July and August this year following cases of ambulance breaking down one after another; and whether the Administration will increase the frequency of ambulance inspection and formulate a long-term plan for ambulance replacement?

Reply:

President,

(a) From January to September this year, there were a total of 680 maintenance cases on ambulances of the Fire Services Department (FSD) arising from mechanical failure, representing an average of 76 cases per month. These cases include breakdowns occurred while the ambulances were attending service calls and those occurred during standby. The figures are comparable to those recorded over the past three years from 2005 to 2007.

From January to September 2005, there were a total of 814 maintenance cases, representing a monthly average of 90 cases. There were 711 cases within the same period in 2006, or an average of 79 cases per month. Within the same period in 2007, there were 760 cases or 85 cases per month on average.

Generally speaking, the frequency of ambulance breakdown is higher in the summer from July to September. Take the figures in 2005 to 2007 for example, there was an average of 108 ambulance breakdown cases per month in the summer, which was about 40% higher than that in other months. The higher number of ambulance breakdown in the summer may be attributed to the

heat and humidity, which makes the air conditioners on the ambulances more prone to damage, depletes the batteries and wears out engine belts. Vehicle age is also a contributing factor in some cases.

(b) The Administration has all along been replacing ambulances in accordance with the need. As for the 123 ambulances mentioned in the question, funding for their replacement was secured in previous years. The expenditure involved is around HK\$147 million. In addition, in the Resource Allocation Exercise this year, the Government has provided further funding to the FSD for the procurement of a further 73 ambulances in batches. The expenditure involved is around HK\$97 million. In other words, the Government has altogether allocated some HK\$240 million to replace a total of 196 aged ambulances in batches. Of these new vehicles, the first 100 will be put into service before the end of 2009, with the remaining 96 becoming available within the first half of 2010. After all 196 ambulances have been put into service, 80% of the FSD's new ambulance fleet will be under two years old, and the age of the fleet will be reduced from the current average of 8.4 years to 1.7 years.

Under the current arrangement of FSD for replacing ambulances, the main criteria include the age, maintenance history and mileage of the vehicles. When the replacement exercise is largely completed by mid-2010, nearly 80% of the ambulance fleet will have been replaced and all ambulance regions in the territory will benefit.

(c) From July 24 to 30, the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) carried out a round of special inspection on all 250 ambulances in FSD's fleet. During the inspection, engine belts, batteries and air-conditioner components were replaced immediately, if required. As for preventive maintenance, the EMSD has increased the frequency of scheduled maintenance on ambulances from three to four times a year since September 16, 2008. With the commissioning of a large number of new ambulances, more frequent scheduled maintenance, and closer monitoring by FSD staff on the operation and maintenance of ambulances, the Administration is confident that in the long run, the reliability of ambulance service will be enhanced to ensure the provision of quality emergency ambulance service.

Ends/Wednesday, October 22, 2008
Issued at HKT 14:38

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List of relevant documents on emergency ambulance service

Date of meeting	Meeting	Document / Paper No.
13.10.1998	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)751/98-99</u>)
		Administration's paper entitled "Performance indicator for the emergency ambulance service" (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)382/98-99(03)</u>)
28.1.2000	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)1325/99-00</u>)
		Administration's paper entitled "Review of Response time and performance target for the emergency ambulance service" (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)830/99-00(04)</u>)
6.4.2000	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)1817/99-00</u>)
		Administration's paper entitled "Replacement of Communications and Mobilizing System for Fire Services Department" (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)1554/99-00(04)</u>)
4.5.2000	Subcommittee on Emergency Ambulance Service	Minutes of meeting (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)1941/99-00</u>)
23.5.2000	Subcommittee on Emergency Ambulance Service	Minutes of meeting (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)114/00-01</u>)
		Administration's paper entitled "Information provided by the Administration upon the request of the Subcommittee on Emergency Ambulance Service" (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)1545/99-00(01)</u>)
		Administration's paper entitled "Emergency ambulance service" (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)1452/99-00(02)</u>)
-	Subcommittee on Emergency Ambulance Service	Report (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)2270/99-00</u>)
7.6.2005	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)2520/04-05</u>)
		Administration's paper entitled "Provision of Emergency Ambulance Service" (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)1740/04-05(05)</u>)

Date of meeting	Meeting	Document / Paper No.
		Background brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat on emergency ambulance service (<u>LC Paper No. CB(2)1725/04-05(01)</u>)
1.4.2008	Finance Committee	Administration's replies to Members' initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. SB005, SB064, SB065 & SB068)
21.5.2008	Legislative Council	Question raised by Hon LAU Kong-wah on emergency ambulance service (Question 12)
22.10.2008	Legislative Council	Question raised by Hon WONG Ting-kwong on emergency ambulance service (Question 4)

Council Business Division 2
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