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Mr S Y WONG
Sub-committee on Building Safety and Related Issues
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central, Hong Kong

12 August 2010

Dear Mr WONG,

**Meeting on 27 July 2010
Supplementary Information**

At the meeting of the Subcommittee on Building Safety and Related Issues on 27 July 2010, Members discussed the means of assistance in relation to the implementation of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap 572) (the Ordinance). Some Members at the meeting requested the Administration to provide information on granting owners of old buildings exemption from the requirement of installing fire services water tanks in their buildings. In response, we provide the relevant information as follows :

The Ordinance has come into effect since 1 July 2007. Its purpose is to enhance the fire protection standard of about 12 000 private composite and domestic buildings constructed in or before 1987¹ in Hong Kong. It requires buildings to provide or improve fire service installations and equipment, of which fire hydrant and/or hose reel system are of utmost importance in enhancing the fire safety of buildings as they can effectively reduce the risk of the loss of life and property in case of fire. To put the system's function of protecting the building into full play, suitable fire services water tank should be installed to support the system. In this connection, fire services water tank is one of the key installations stipulated by the Ordinance.

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¹ It refers to buildings constructed before 1 March 1987, or with building plans initially submitted to the Building Authority for approval on or before 1 March 1987.

According to the experience of the Fire Services Department (FSD), most of the structural and technical problems concerning the installation of fire services water tank can be resolved by various means such as the selection of a suitable position for installation, common use of existing fire services water tank or reduction of water tank capacity, etc. With a view to assisting owners and occupiers to comply with the requirements of the Ordinance, FSD has all along adopted a flexible and pragmatic principle in the enforcement of the Ordinance. For example, FSD allows the modification of fresh water tank/flushing water tank/sprinkler water tank/abandoned water tank as an alternative to fire services water tank.

In view of the above, and for the purpose of providing better fire protection for the owners, occupiers and visitors, we consider it inappropriate to exempt owners of old buildings from the requirement of installing fire services water tanks. Exemptions could only be granted to buildings with spatial constraints and/or technical difficulties after assessment by authorized persons to the effect that installation of fire services water tanks of any capacity is impossible. Since the implementation of the Ordinance, only one case of exemption from the requirement of installing fire services water tank in building has been granted. The case involved a 4-storey pre-war old composite building in which only one staircase (served as the only means of escape as well) was provided as common area. The entrusted authorized person considered that the installation of hose reel system at the staircase would further reduce the effective width of the already narrow means of escape. Moreover, the design and ownership of the roof of the building rendered it impossible to install water tank and water pump of hose reel system. Furthermore, installation of such water tank and water pump would affect the structure of the building. In the light of the spatial, structural and technical constraints and difficulties of the said building, FSD had exempted it from the requirement of installing hose reel system including water tank.

Yours sincerely,

(NG Kuen-chi)
for Director of Fire Services

c.c. Secretary for Security
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