

立法會

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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 9 February 2010

Development of columbarium facilities

Purpose

This paper gives an account of the past discussions by the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel) on the development of columbarium facilities.

Background

2. With a growing and aging population in Hong Kong, the number of deaths and the corresponding number of cremations have been rising gradually year on year. According to the Administration, it is projected that the annual number of deaths will increase steadily from 43 700 in 2010 to 52 800 in 2020. The annual number of cremations will also rise from 39 200 in 2010 to 49 600 in 2020 correspondingly. With an increasing demand for cremation service, there is also an increasing need for the supply of niches.

3. At present, in addition to the columbarium facilities run by non-government organisations (e.g. the Board of Management of Chinese Permanent Cemeteries), religious entities and the private sector, there are a total of eight public columbaria managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) providing some 167 900 public niches. About 41 000 public niches will also be provided at the new columbarium at Kiu Tau Road within the Wo Hop Shek Cemetery by the end of 2011 or early 2012.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. At the special meeting of the Panel on 16 October 2009 to receive a briefing from the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) on the 2009-2010 Policy Agenda in

relation to food safety and environmental hygiene, members were advised, amongst others, that the Administration would review the provision of cemeteries, columbaria and crematoria facilities to meet future demand. The Administration would also continue its work on promoting the options of scattering cremated human ashes at sea and in gardens of remembrance (GoRs). Since the new GoRs commenced operation and the procedures for scattering of cremated human ashes at sea were streamlined in 2007, the Administration had handled 538 and 966 applications respectively.

5. Hon TAM Yiu-chung asked whether consideration would be given to allowing private columbaria to operate in industrial buildings. Mr TAM was also of the view that the Administration should adopt computerised columbarium operation as practised in Japan.

6. SFH advised that the Administration was looking at other innovative ideas, such as using industrial buildings, for providing columbarium facilities. SFH further advised that he would visit Japan in November 2009 to gain first-hand knowledge of the development and operation of columbarium facilities there.

7. Hon WONG Yung-kan urged the Administration to formulate clear guidelines on applications for development of private columbaria. SFH advised that the Food and Health Bureau would discuss with the Lands Department on ways to ensure that development of private columbaria could meet demand on the one hand and acceptance of people in the vicinity of the proposed private columbaria on the other.

8. On the question of whether the Administration was exploring the option of limiting the interment of cinerary urns in newly allocated public niches to, say, seven years, to address the shortage of niches, SFH advised that the Administration had no plan to do so.

Recent developments

9. SFH visited two funeral facilities, i.e. Tama Reien and Kannai Ryokuen, during his visit to Tokyo, Japan, from 25 to 28 November 2009. Tama Reien was built by Tokyo Metropolitan Government, whereas Kannai Ryokuen is a privately operated multi-storey columbarium installed with automatic urn conveyance system and internet-based praying system.

10. In his reply to an oral question raised by Hon KAM Nai-wai on the regulation of private columbarium facilities at the Council meeting on 9 December 2009, SFH advised that the Administration would look into ways for setting up a voluntary registration system for operators of private columbaria to enhance consumer protection.

11. To encourage environmental friendly interment and promote scattering of cremated human ashes at sea, a free ferry service departing from Sai Wan Ho

Public Pier for east of Tung Lung Chau every Saturday morning was launched by FEHD on 23 January 2010.

Relevant papers

12. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>) for details of the relevant paper and minutes of the meeting.

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