



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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3 November 2010

Clerk to LegCo Panel on
Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn: Miss Betty MA)
(Fax No.: 2185 7845)

Dear Miss Ma,

Public Columbarium Development

At the Legislative Council (LegCo) meeting held on 15 October 2010, Members asked the Secretary for Food and Health to provide information regarding public columbarium development. Our reply is set out below.

Currently, there are eight public columbaria managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) providing about 167 900 niches, all of which have been allotted. Distribution of these public niches is set out at **Annex A**. In addition, some 300 re-used public niches are available each year for allotment to applicants on the waiting list.

To provide more public columbarium facilities, the FEHD has since 2004

built 30 113 new niches in its five public columbaria respectively. Among these, the FEHD put up for allotment a total of 21 875 public niches in Kwai Chung and Diamond Hill in 2009. These niches can accommodate about 47 100 urns. In July 2009, the Finance Committee of the LegCo approved funding for construction of a new public columbarium within the Wo Hop Shek Cemetery. This, together with the planned minor works in Cheung Chau Cemetery and Mui Wo Lai Chi Yuen, are expected to provide some 42 500 new public niches by 2012, which can accommodate more than 85 000 urns.

Apart from public columbaria, 14 of the private cemeteries specified in Schedule 5 to the *Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance* (Cap. 132), mainly operated by religious or ethnic organisations for non-profit making purposes, also provided columbarium facilities. Among them, the four cemeteries managed by the Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries (BMCP) provide a total of 210 000 niches, all of which have been allotted apart from a few to be re-used. The BMCP anticipated that about 50 000 newly-built niches will be provided in 2010-2013. Other cemeteries managed by Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist and other religious bodies provide about 126 700 niches in total, of which some 38 300 are not yet allotted. There are 8 000 new niches built recently in Protestant cemeteries and it is projected that about 7 000 new niches will be available in Buddhist and Protestant cemeteries in the next two years.

In the last ten years (2000-2009), niches provided by the Government only accounted for about 14% of cremations in the same period, or 40% if the BMCP is to be taken into account.

According to experience, the progress in providing new public columbaria is primarily constrained by the fact that Hong Kong is a densely populated city; the very limited availability of space in the territory for columbarium facilities and the local community resistance and reluctance to have such facilities in their districts. Over the past few years, the FEHD has consulted the relevant District Councils (DCs) on a number of proposed columbarium development projects. Many DCs and local residents have expressed concern that the projects might have psychological, environmental and visual impacts on them, and cause problems such as traffic congestion and environmental pollution. The FEHD has therefore encountered enormous resistance in local consultation and a number of columbarium projects involving over 240 000 niches have been shelved as a result (details at **Annex B**). Although it is theoretically practicable to provide columbaria at remote sites far away from residential areas (such as uninhabited outlying islands), we will have to take into account the infrastructural support and transport capacity in the district especially during the Ching Ming and Chung Yeung Festivals. From past experience, it was by no means easy to identify suitable sites for columbarium development. Having said that, the Government

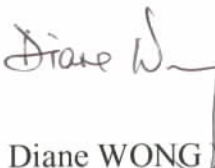
will continue to actively look for suitable sites in all districts for columbarium development purpose and will further its efforts in soliciting support from the DCs and local communities through continuous communication. The Government will also improve the outlook and layout of proposed columbaria through flexible design in order to ease the concern and anxiety of nearby residents.

The public consultation on review of columbarium policy just ended on 30 September. On increasing the supply of columbarium facilities, the community is generally in support of district-based columbarium development projects and hopes the Government will improve the outlook and layout of the relevant facilities, thus enhancing public acceptance of these facilities. For the first batch of 12 potential sites in seven districts shortlisted in the consultation document, most of the DCs have given in-principle support to the sites in respective districts for columbarium development. The Administration is conducting technical feasibility studies (such as traffic impact assessment) for the proposed sites. Once a site is confirmed to be suitable for columbarium development, the relevant DC will be formally consulted again. In addition, some respondents expected the Government to take the lead in the supply of columbarium facilities, while many felt that private columbaria also played an important role in the market in terms of the choice of niches.

As stated in the 2010-11 Policy Agenda, the Government will continue to identify suitable sites for columbarium development across the territory and conduct technical feasibility studies of shortlisted sites to increase supply of columbarium facilities; and will consolidate the feedback received in the public consultation on review of columbarium policy and formulate appropriate measures to enhance regulation of private columbaria. The Food and Health Bureau is consolidating and analysing views collected, and will report back to the relevant Panel of the LegCo on the consultation outcome in due course.

Grateful if you would provide the above supplementary information to Members.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Diane Wong", with a stylized flourish at the end.

(DIANE WONG)
for Secretary for Food and Health

Annex A**Public niches under the management of the FEHD**

Public Columbaria	Date of Completion	Year (Provision of Additional Niches)	Total No. of Niches
Cape Collinson	1963-1994	2006 (2 088)	61 615
Diamond Hill	1979-1992	2009 (18 501)	61 811
Fu Shan	1985	-	9 625
Kwai Chung	1979	2006 (2 394) 2008 (3 374)	9 276
Wo Hop Shek	1975	2006 (2 520)	22 290
Cheung Chau	1991	2004 (210) 2007 (1 026)	2 335
Lamma Island	1991	-	490
Ping Chau	1991	-	490
Total			167 932

Annex B

Local Consultation on Columbarium Development Projects

The table below lists out the proposed columbarium development projects on which the FEHD has consulted the relevant DCs and local residents over the past few years. Due to the lack of local support or constraints on supporting transport facilities, the planned public columbarium development projects, involving over **240 000** niches, have been shelved.

Year	District	Proposed Public Columbarium Development Project	Consultation Outcome/Other Constraints
December 2005	Kwai Tsing	In-situ construction of 44 000 niches at the old crematoriums of Kwai Chung Crematorium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Local objection● Transport capacity in the area unable to cope with the demand according to the traffic impact assessment
January 2006	Sha Tin	Construction of 17 500 niches on the land within Fu Shan Crematorium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Local objection● Transport capacity in the area unable to cope with the demand according to the traffic impact assessment
March 2006	North	Construction of 3 000 niches in total at two sites in Wo Hop Shek Cemetery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Project approved by the North DC District Development and Environmental Improvement Committee● Project shelved because of objections from villagers when construction was about to commence
March 2006	North	Construction of 42 000 niches at a site near the Gallant Garden within Wo Hop Shek Cemetery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Local objection● Insufficient supporting transport facilities
May 2006	Tuen Mun	Construction of crematorium and columbarium facilities at the planned site of Area 46 (It is estimated that over 100 000 niches can be built)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Three motions passed by the Tuen Mun DC objecting to the project● An alternative site requested
February 2007	North	Construction of 31 500 niches at a present FEHD carpark site within Wo Hop Shek Cemetery and 2 900 niches at three sites along the roadside of Gallant Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Local objection

Supplementary note: Follow-up work

1. In June 2006, the Kwai Tsing DC endorsed the provision of additional niches on a small scale at Kwai Chung Columbarium. The FEHD completed the construction of 3 374 additional niches in 2008.
2. In February to March 2008, the FEHD gained the support of the North DC and local villagers for building 41 000 new niches at Kiu Tau Road in Wo Hop Shek, which are expected to be completed in 2012.
3. In March 2009, the FEHD, in collaboration with the Tuen Mun DC, explored the feasibility of identifying an alternative site in Tuen Mun for the development of columbarium facilities.
4. In July 2010, the Food and Health Bureau published the consultation document on review of columbarium policy. The document listed the first batch of 12 sites in seven districts for studying whether it would be feasible and appropriate to develop them for columbarium use (Among them, there are three in Kwai Tsing, two in Sha Tin, two in North and one in Tuen Mun District), to which most of the DCs have given in-principle support. The Government will continue to identify suitable sites for columbarium development across the territory and conduct technical feasibility studies of shortlisted sites to increase supply of columbarium facilities.