

**LETTERHEAD OF GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT**

本函檔號 OUR REF.: SBCR 2/1866/97 Pt. 10

來函檔號 YOUR REF.:

Our Tel. No.:2810 2003

Our Fax. No.:2523 4171

11 March, 1999

The Secretary  
LegCo Panel on Security  
c/o Legislative Council Secretariat  
Legislative Council Building  
8 Jackson Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

Dear madam,

**Proposed Karaoke Licensing Requirements**

I refer to the further submission from Professor Drysdale, following the meeting of the LegCo Panel on Security on 7 January to discuss licence control of karaoke establishments.

We have the following comments on the points raised by Professor Drysdale-

*(a) The use of materials which ignite with difficulty and burn slowly in furniture would prevent or delay a flashover.....So there is going to be ample time for people to escape.*

---

We recognise the added value in controlling fire risk by controlling the combustibility of the materials in karaoke establishments. For this reason, one of the proposed karaoke licensing requirements is to require all false ceilings, partitions, wall furnishings, draperies and curtains to be made of fire resisting materials or treated with fire retardant solution.

The Government has carried out a study on international flammability standards for selected furniture items applicable in other countries, including USA, UK, Australia and New Zealand, and will propose appropriate flammability standards in the local context to help improve fire safety in licensed premises.

Professor Drysdale has put much emphasis on the timeline analysis for an individual to escape and the fire to reach 'flashover'. It is perhaps too bold an assumption to expect that all things will happen as predicted and all patrons will be able to leave the fire scene efficiently.

In the case of karaoke establishments, there are many factors affecting the evacuation time, such as the alertness and mobility of the patrons especially under the influence of loud music and often alcohol, patrons being unfamiliar with the surrounding environment and the complexity of the cubicle layout and escape routes of the premises. These are all crucial factors which must be taken into account carefully. Another important consideration is the safety of our firemen throughout their fire fighting and rescue operations.

Hence controlling the combustibility of the materials used in karaoke establishments should help but it does not obviate the need for the safety requirements proposed by the Buildings Department in protecting the public from the effect of fire.

Indeed, we do not agree that fire resistance is relevant only to a fully developed fire; it has other fire-safety objectives to fulfil. The effective confinement of fire spread through compartmentation relies on the fire resistance of the enclosure in performing the insulation function. The exit corridors in karaoke establishments with proper fire resistance capability will ensure, within a reasonable time frame, a safe and protected route for patrons to escape as well as fire-fighters to conduct rescue and fire fighting operations.

- (b) *It is possible to specify fire resistance of less than 1 hour. But the specification is only meant for protecting the structure of the building and preventing the spread of a fully developed fire.*
- 

We would reiterate that for the corridors in karaoke establishments, fire resistance of less than 1 hour is not acceptable.

According to the current standard laid down in the Code of Practice for Fire Resisting Construction, the requirement for an 1-hour fire resisting period is the minimum for a fire resisting wall.

There are obvious merits in providing 1-hour fire resisting requirement for the corridors within a karaoke establishment. The maintenance of a fire safe corridor and effective containment of fire within the cubicles will, to a large extent, facilitate the evacuation of patrons, inhibit the spread of smoke, confine the fire to the cubicles and provide a safer operating environment for fire fighters.

(c) *The walls of karaoke rooms wall paper on plaster are non combustible.*

We note that the partition walls in existing karaoke establishments are constructed with a wide variety of building materials which may be combustible. Even with the application of fire retardant paint on the wall surface, it can only provide a minimal resistance to the ignition of fire and its spread, certainly not up to the required 1-hour resistance standard.

Without proper fire separation, once a fire starts inside an enclosed cubicle, the radiant heat can be transmitted quickly through the partition walls and doors to the corridor and thus creates a dangerous environment for escape by the customers and rescue by our fire fighters.

Yours sincerely,

(Mak Kwok-wah)  
for Secretary for Security