

**For discussion  
on 19 June 2000**

**LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs  
Sub-committee on Matters Relating to Environmental Hygiene**

**Water Dripping from Ventilating Systems**

**PURPOSE**

This paper informs Members of the problem of water dripping from ventilating systems and the work of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) in tackling this problem.

**BACKGROUND**

2. Pursuant to Section 12(1)(g) of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132), the discharge of water from the ventilating system in any premises which constitutes a nuisance may be dealt with summarily under Section 127 of the Ordinance.

3. Under Section 127 of the Ordinance, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) is empowered to issue a Nuisance Notice to the actual person causing the nuisance, or in circumstances where that particular person cannot be identified, the Notice will be served on the occupier or owner of the premises, requiring him to abate the nuisance within the period specified in the Notice. If DFEH thinks fit, she may specify any works to be executed for the abatement purpose. Failure to comply with the requirement of the Nuisance Notice will lead to prosecution under Section 127(3) of the Ordinance. Upon conviction, the defendant is liable to a maximum penalty of \$10,000 and a daily fine of \$200 if the offence continues.

**SOURCE OF NUISANCES**

4. Operation of air-conditioners generates condensation. There are a few

models of air-conditioners in the market that dispose of condensed water by evaporation. A vast majority of models, however, do not have such a feature and require installation of a dripping pan and connecting hose for discharge of water. Furthermore, water dripping may still occur if the discharge facilities are not properly maintained, especially after heavy rain or typhoons.

5. There are many old tenement buildings and private residential estates built before the 1980s which provide neither purpose-built concrete boxes/platforms to accommodate air-conditioners nor drainage pipes to collect water discharged from air-conditioners. Many of such buildings and private residential units are in the Eastern District, Kwun Tong, Kowloon City, Western District, Wanchai and Sham Shui Po.

## **INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS**

6. Health Inspectors (“HIs”) of the 20 Environmental Hygiene Offices of FEHD are responsible for handling complaints about water dripping from air-conditioners. Upon receipt of complaints, they will conduct site visits to investigate the source of the nuisances. If the source can be identified, a Nuisance Notice will be issued to the occupier/owner of the premises concerned to require abatement of the nuisance within a specified period of seven or 14 days, depending on the complexity of the rectification work involved. From our experience, the vast majority of the occupiers/owners will comply with the Notice by conducting the necessary rectification work within the specified period. A flow chart showing the procedures for handling complaints is at Annex A.

7. Investigation into complaints related to water dripping from air-conditioners is often long drawn and frustrating for both our HIs and the complainants. The key reasons are as follows:

- (a) Water dripping in residential buildings usually occurs at night or in the early morning. It is difficult to locate the source of nuisance in dim light and the problem is exacerbated by the fact that most are multi-storey high-rise buildings.
- (b) It is difficult to ascertain the source of the nuisance in the case of multiple sources of dripping, which is common in multi-storey buildings with air-conditioners installed vertically at the same location on each floor.

- (c) Occupiers/owners may not be at home at the time of call by our HIs. In some cases, unco-operative occupiers/owners of suspected premises may refuse our entry and cause hindrance to our investigation work.
- (d) If the air-conditioner suspected to be the source of nuisance is not in operation at the time of investigation, HIs have to ask the occupier/owner to turn on the air-conditioner to confirm if there is any water dripping. This may not be achievable until the air-conditioner has been run for at least 30 minutes.
- (e) The problem of water dripping from air-conditioners is seasonal and tends to cluster in the summer months where complaint figures can shoot up many fold within a very short time causing a sudden increase of workload.

8. In 1999, the two former Municipal Services Department received some 5,800 complaints about water dripping from air-conditioners, with Eastern District scoring the highest number of complaints at 936, Kwun Tong with 577 and 435 in Kowloon City. A total of 389 Nuisance Notices were issued. Up to 31 May 2000, FEHD has received 813 complaints and issued 43 Notices. Details are at Annex B.

## **ACTION PLAN TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM**

9. In view of the nature and large number of complaints of water dripping from air-conditioners, FEHD has formulated joint inter-departmental efforts in conjunction with the Buildings Department (BD) and Housing Department (HD) to tackle the problem. Our efforts aim, on one hand, at tackling and preventing the problem at source and taking remedial action on the other. Our joint efforts include the following:-

- (a) BD sets the provision of drain pipes for collection of condensation from air conditioners in new buildings as a standard in the drainage and plumbing code. For existing buildings, such requirement has been included in the practice note for the attention of authorized persons.
- (b) BD provides regular information on their clearance operations on unauthorized building works on external walls of buildings to facilitate FEHD to take actions against owners / occupiers of the premises with

dripping air-conditioners.

- (c) HD has installed PVC condensation drain pipes adjacent to the air-conditioner hoods in domestic blocks in public housing estates completed after 1996. As the owner and management body, HD also conducts initial investigation on all water dripping nuisance from air-conditioners in public housing estates and requests the tenants concerned to conduct rectification work. Unresolved cases will be referred to FEHD for follow-up action, including the issue of Nuisance Notices to unco-operative tenants.
- (d) FEHD has issued advisory letters to suppliers of air-conditioners to seek their assistance in advising customers to install suitable dripping pans and drain pipes for discharging water from air-conditioners.

10. Dripping water from air-conditioners is an annoying nuisance but one which is not difficult to prevent or resolve if each owner/occupier takes some responsibility and shows concern for good neighbourhood. In order to promote general awareness and to enlist citizens' support, FEHD will take the follow actions:-

- (a) Arrange publicity, including production of a new API and distribution of posters and leaflets to Owners Incorporations (OCs), Mutual Aid Committees (MACs) and property management companies, and through them seek public co-operation to properly install and maintain individual household air-conditioners.
- (b) Request MACs, OCs and property management companies to assist in resolving complaints about dripping air-conditioners in their buildings/estates. They can help to mediate and advise the occupier/owner concerned to conduct rectification work in the interest of common good. FEHD stands ready to back up and to take up problematic cases if required.

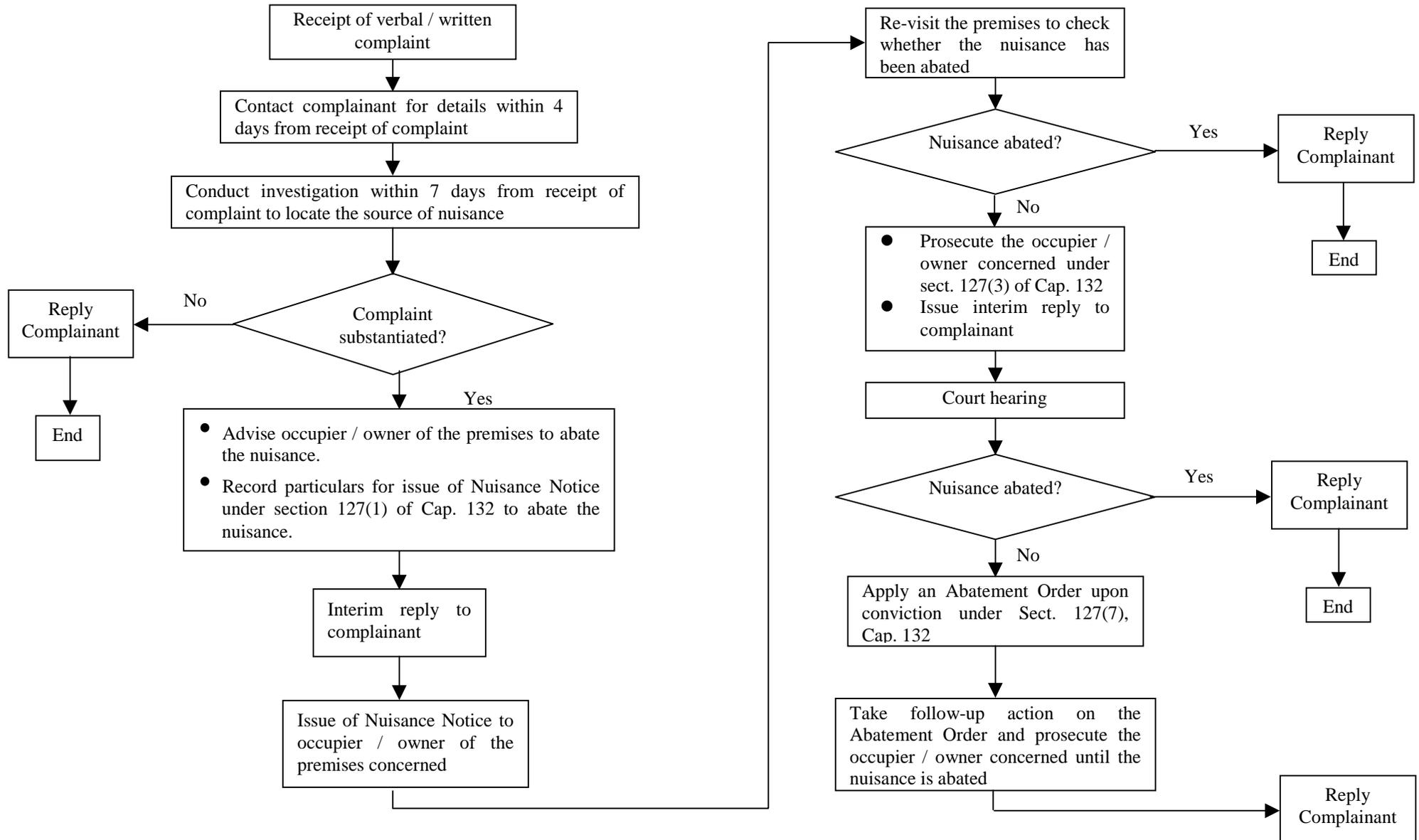
11. In parallel, in order to enhance our capacity to handle increased complaints and so that complaints can be speedily dealt with, FEHD will launch a pilot scheme whereby short-term staff with academic qualification in building studies, environmental health or mechanical engineering will be engaged on Non-Civil Service Contract term to help out in the investigation work. We have advertised for this and hope that the recruits could start work as soon as possible.

**ADVICE SOUGHT**

12. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and to offer views and comments on our action plan as set out in paras. 9 – 11 above.

**FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE DEPARTMENT  
JUNE 2000**

**Flow Chart on Handling of Water Dripping Nuisance from Ventilating System**



**Complaints about Water Dripping from Ventilating System**

<b>1999</b>	<b>No. of Complaints</b>
Jan	9
Feb	9
Mar	93
Apr	243
May	607
Jun	1387
Jul	1264
Aug	1036
Sep	743
Oct	316
Nov	81
Dec	17
	<b>5805</b>
<b>2000</b>	
	<b>No. of Complaints</b>
Jan – May	<b>813</b>

Annex B

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## 食物環境衛生署

## FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE DEPARTMENT

東區環境衛生辦事處

Eastern District Office (Environmental Hygiene)

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## REGISTERED MAIL

Ref:( ) in FEHD E

S.N. E /2000

## Seventh Schedule

## Form C

## PUBLIC HEALTH AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES ORDINANCE, CAP. 132

(Section 127(1))

To :

Take notice that under the provisions of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, Cap.132, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene being satisfied of the existence at \_\_\_\_\_ of a nuisance, being \_\_\_\_\_ of the said premises in such a manner as to be a nuisance, do hereby require you, within \_\_\_\_\_ days from the service of this notice, to abate the nuisance, and for that purpose to \_\_\_\_\_ of the said premises and to prevent the recurrence of the nuisance.

If you make default in complying with the requirements of this notice (or if the said nuisance, though abated, is likely to recur) application will be made to a Magistrate's Court for a summons to be issued requiring your attendance before such court to answer a complaint which will be made for the purpose of enforcing the abatement of the nuisance and/or prohibiting the recurrence thereof, or both, and for recovering the costs and penalties that may be incurred thereby.

For enquiry, please contact Health Inspector \_\_\_\_\_ on tel no \_\_\_\_\_

Dated this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2000.

( )  
Assistant District Secretary (Eastern)  
for Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene