



Columbarium facilities in Hong Kong

Figure 1 – Number of deaths and cremations between 2005 and 2015

Year	Number of deaths	Number of cremations	Number of cremations as a percentage of number of deaths
2005	38 683	33 288	86.1%
2010	42 705	38 006	89.0%
2015	46 757	42 737	91.4%

Figure 2 – New niches allocated by the Government between 2010 and 2015

Year	Number of applications	Number of new niches allocated ^{(1), (2)}
2010	0	0
2011	0	0
2012	24 267	1 612
2013	13 172	12 913
2014	16 321	12 053
2015	11 627	14 573

Notes: (1) New niches are allocated through computer balloting. Unsuccessful applications would be carried forward automatically to subsequent phases of allocation through computer balloting if the applicant has so requested in the application form. There is no waiting list for the allocation of new niches. This allocation arrangement is subject to review before commissioning of the columbarium facilities in 2019.

(2) The year in which new niches are allocated may not be the same as that in which the applications are made.

Figure 3 – Re-allocation of returned niches

Year	Number of applications received for the year	Number of niches re-allocated	Number of applications on waiting list ⁽¹⁾
2011	5 341	416	17 286
2012	4 852	255	22 138
2013	5 037	230	21 360
2014	5 554	193	23 235
2015	7 164	394	21 048

Note: (1) Some applicants might have also applied for new public niches and withdrawn from the list if new niches were allocated to them.

Highlights

- In Hong Kong, the demand for columbarium facilities has been increasing in the light of the gradual rise in the number of deaths and the corresponding number of cremations in recent years (**Figure 1**). This trend should continue as the Government projects the annual average numbers of deaths and cremations to reach 57 000 and 54 000 respectively during 2016-2035. These were higher than the corresponding figures of 38 000 and 32 000 during 1995-2015. As such, there has been concern about the inadequate supply of columbarium facilities in Hong Kong.
- According to the latest figure available, public columbaria and private cemeteries provided about 573 400 niches as at end-June 2015. The former accounted for 37% of the total and the latter 63%. There are also niches provided by private columbaria, but there is no publicly available information on the exact number of these columbaria.
- As to the supply of public niches, some new public columbarium facilities were completed in 2012 and 2013 and were available for allocation (**Figure 2**). Before that, a number of columbarium projects had been shelved due to objection from local residents and the District Councils concerned. Notwithstanding the availability of new public niches during 2012-2015, there was still a serious shortage of public niches as evident in the number of applications on the waiting list for returned niches (**Figure 3**). As at 7 December 2016, the waiting time for returned niches for the latest allocations ranged from one month to 82 months depending on the location of the columbaria and the type of niche allocated.

Columbarium facilities in Hong Kong (cont'd)

Figure 4 – Public columbarium facilities completed and planned to be built since 2006

	Number of niches
Columbarium facilities completed	
2006-2009	29 903
2012-2013	46 250
Total	76 153
Columbarium facilities planned to be built and target commissioning year⁽¹⁾	
2018	855
2019	160 000
2020	44 000
Total	204 855

Note: (1) The Government has also planned to provide 285 000 niches under four other columbarium projects which have obtained support from the District Councils concerned. Yet, the target commissioning year of these facilities has not been confirmed.

Figure 5 – Compliance status of private columbaria as at June 2015

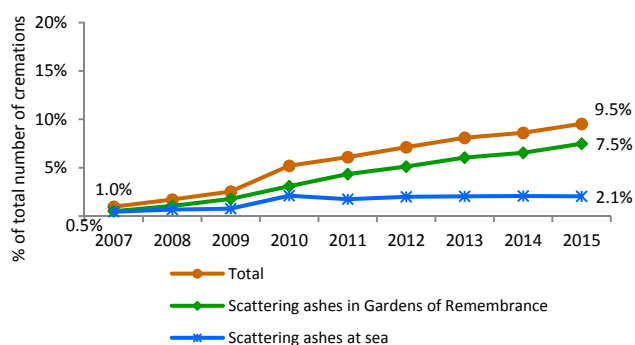
	Number ⁽¹⁾
Private columbaria on Part A of Development Bureau's List⁽²⁾ (excluding private cemeteries)	15
Private columbaria on Part B of Development Bureau's List⁽³⁾	126
- Not in compliance with town planning requirements	110 (87%)
- Not in compliance with user restrictions in the land leases and/or unlawful occupation of Government land	84 (67%)

Notes: (1) The number does not cover all private columbaria operating in Hong Kong.

(2) Part A of the List sets out those private columbaria made known to the Lands Department and/or Planning Department which are compliant with the user restrictions in the land leases and the statutory town planning requirements, and are not illegally occupying Government land.

(3) Part B of the List sets out those private columbaria made known to the Lands Department and/or Planning Department that do not fall under Part A.

Figure 6 – Usage of green burial services



Highlights

- Nonetheless, the acute shortage of public niches should continue into the next two years for the lack of large scale columbarium facilities coming on stream before 2019 (**Figure 4**). In view of the observation that 77% (155 296) of the occupied public niches had unused urn spaces as at end-June 2015, the Audit Commission had recommended the Government to promote utilization of these urn spaces among families with allocated niches.
- Private columbaria play an important role in supplying niches to the public, but many of them do not comply with statutory and government requirements according to the information published by the Development Bureau (**Figure 5**). The Government introduced the Private Columbaria Bill in June 2014 to set out the framework for regulating private columbaria. The Bill lapsed at the end of term of the Fifth Legislative Council and was re-introduced in the Sixth Legislative Council in November 2016.
- Private columbaria intending to seek exemption under the new regulatory regime after passage of the Private Columbaria Bill have to cease selling niches since the announcement of the Bill in June 2014. These private columbaria cannot sell new niches until they obtain a licence under the new regulatory regime. As such, the supply of private niches has been affected during the interim period.
- The Government has since 2007 promoted the adoption of green burial services such as scattering ashes in the Gardens of Remembrance and at sea as one of the strategies to meet the long-term demand for facilities related to the disposal of cremated ashes. Despite the rising trend of adoption, these services just accounted for 9.5% of cremations in 2015 (**Figure 6**).

Data sources: Latest figures from Audit Commission, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, and Food and Health Bureau.

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