

Columbarium facilities in Hong Kong

Figure 1 – Number of deaths and cremations, 2007-2017

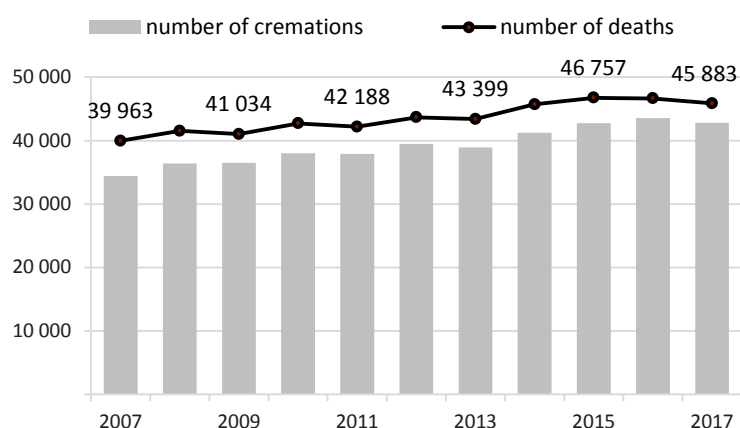


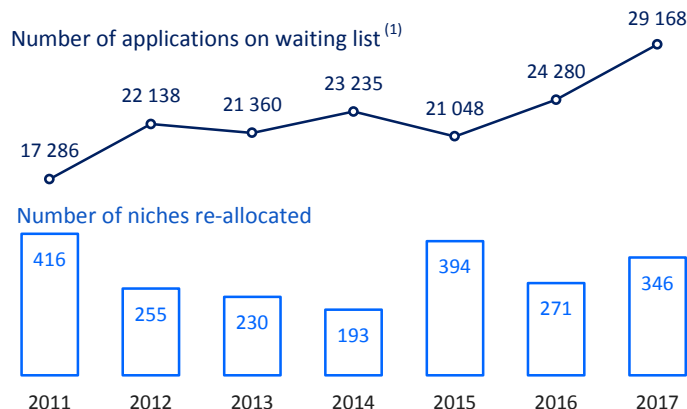
Figure 2 – New niches allocated by the Government, 2010-2017

Year	Number of applications	Number of new niches allocated ⁽¹⁾
2010 ⁽²⁾	0	0
2011 ⁽²⁾	0	0
2012	24 267	1 612
2013	13 172	12 913
2014	16 321	12 053
2015	11 627	14 573
2016	178	5 239
2017	199	197

Notes: (1) The year in which new niches are allocated may not be the same as that in which the applications are made.

(2) A number of columbarium projects had been shelved due to objection from local residents and the District Council.

Figure 3 – Re-allocation of returned niches, 2011-2017



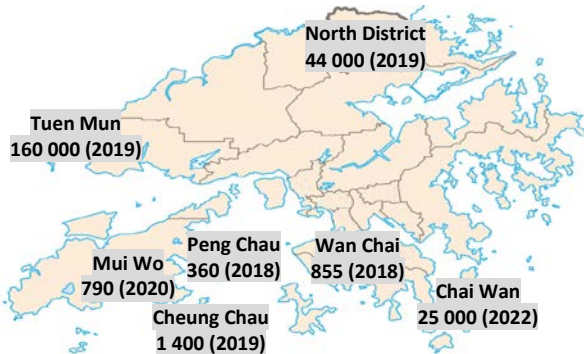
Note: (1) Some applicants might have also applied for new public niches and withdrawn from the list if new niches were allocated to them.

Highlights

- In Hong Kong, the demand for columbarium facilities has been on the rise in recent years, in line with the general uptrend in the number of deaths and the corresponding number of cremations during the period (**Figure 1**). According to the latest figure available, public columbaria and private cemeteries had provided a total of some 579 500 niches at end-December 2016. The former accounted for 37% of the total and the latter 63%.
- According to the Government's estimate, the average numbers of annual deaths and cremations will reach 59 000 and 56 000 respectively during 2018-2037, increasing from 40 000 and 35 000 respectively in the past 20 years. The above estimate has inevitably aroused the concern about the adequacy of columbarium facilities in the years ahead.
- The Government opened three new public columbarium facilities during 2012-2014, providing 46 250 new niches to be allocated upon application by computer balloting in phases. Since then, there has been a lack of new public columbarium facilities coming on stream which resulted in sharp decreases in the numbers of new applications and new niches allocated in 2016-2017 (**Figure 2**).
- Reflecting the shortage of new public niches, the number of applications on the waiting list for returned niches resumed an uptrend during 2016-2017 (**Figure 3**). As at 6 June 2018, the waiting time for returned niches for the latest allocations ranged from one month to 99 months, depending on the location of the columbaria and the type of niche allocated.

Columbarium facilities in Hong Kong (cont'd)

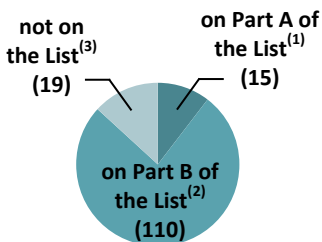
Figure 4 – Supply of new public niches in 2018-2022⁽¹⁾



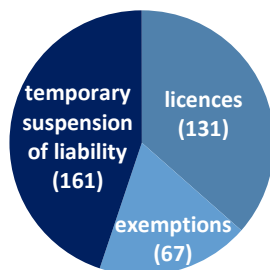
Note: (1) Funding approvals from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council have been obtained for the construction of the new public columbarium facilities.

Figure 5 – Implementation of the Private Columbaria Ordinance as at 29 March 2018

144 applicants comprises private columbaria:

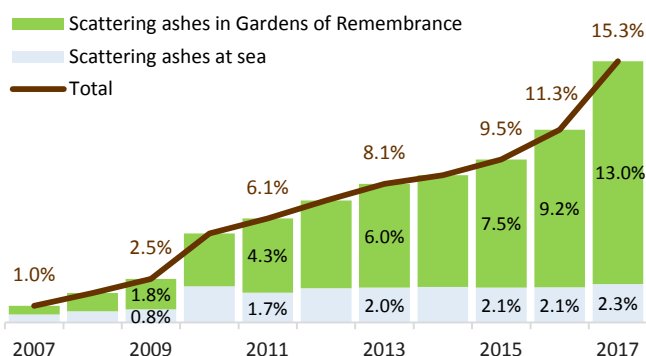


359 applications for:



- Notes:
- (1) Part A of the List refers to 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.
 - (2) Part B of the List refers to those private columbaria made known to the Lands Department and/or Planning Department, but they do not fall under Part A of the List due to reasons such as not in compliance with statutory town planning requirements.
 - (3) Not on the List refers to those private columbaria who do not fall under either Part A or Part B of the List.

Figure 6 – Green burial services as a percentage of the number of cremations, 2007-2017



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Highlights

- The completion of the large scale columbarium facilities in Northern District and Tuen Mun in 2019 should provide some immediate respite to the current shortage of public niches (**Figure 4**). To make the most of future new facilities, the Government has put forward proposals to allocate public niches for an initial interment period of 20 years from 2018, to be followed by extension every 10 years on payment.
- Private columbaria also play an important role in supplying niches to the public. As at end-December 2016, according to the information provided by 133 private columbaria to the Government, there were altogether some 385 000 niches with interred ashes. For better consumer protection, the Private Columbaria Ordinance was enacted in 2017 to regulate the operation of private columbaria through a licensing scheme.
- Under the Ordinance, the operation of a private columbarium must be covered by a licence, temporary suspension of liability ("TSOL") or exemption. Only licensed private columbaria may sell or newly let out niches. Alternatively, operators of private columbaria may apply for exemption status to freeze their scale of operation and cease selling or letting out new or unoccupied niches. Some operators might need time to seek regularization in order to obtain a licence or exemption. They could apply for TSOL to temporarily allow them to continue to maintain the operation of the niches already sold while regularizing their operation.
- A total of 144 private columbaria had submitted 359 applications for licence, exemption and TSOL (**Figure 5**) by 29 March 2018. All these applications are still under processing pending further submission of information or supporting documents.
- Against the shortage of niches, the Government started to promote green burial in 2007 as a sustainable means for handling cremated ashes of the deceased. It was not until most recently that the adoption of green burial services exhibited a more discernible uptrend to account for 11.3% and 15.3% of cremations in 2016 and 2017 respectively (**Figure 6**).

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

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