



Fire safety of mini-storage facilities

Figure 1 – Number of actual fire accidents, 2008-2017

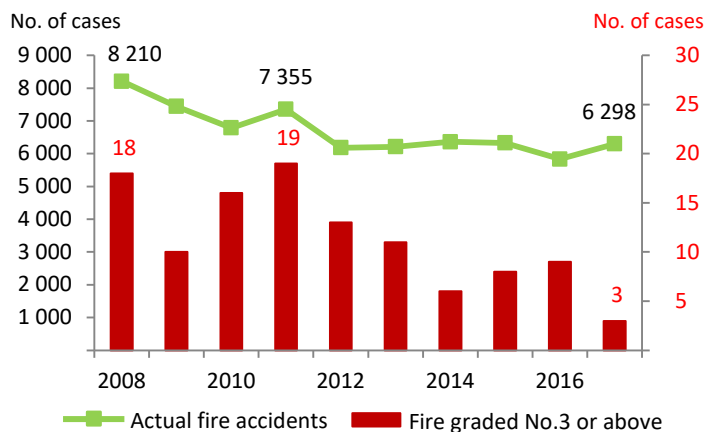


Figure 2 – Number of injuries and fatalities caused by fire accidents, 2008-2017

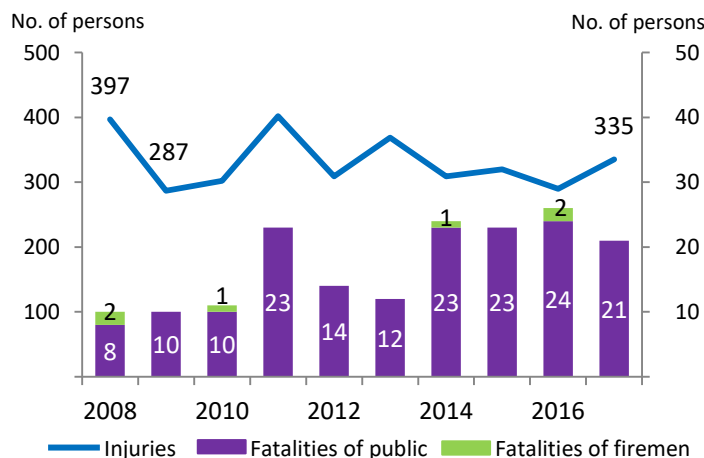
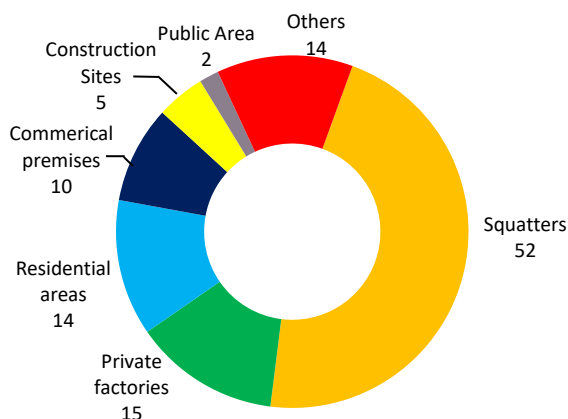


Figure 3 – Type of premises with incidence of serious fire accidents*, 2008-2017



Note: (*) Fire accidents graded No.3 or above.

Highlights

- The number of actual fire accidents in Hong Kong has declined by a cumulative 23% over the past decade to 6 298 cases in 2017, along with enhanced safety awareness amongst the public and regular inspection by Fire Services Department ("FSD"). For more serious fire accidents (graded at No.3 or above), the number even plunged by 83% to only 3 cases over the same period (**Figure 1**). Overcooking, careless handling or disposal of lighted items and electrical faults remained the top three causes of fire accidents, taking up half of the accident caseload.
- As to annual casualties caused by fire accidents, the number of injuries has gone down by 16% in 10 years to 335 persons in 2017, but the number of fatalities has surged by 110% to 21 persons (**Figure 2**). For 2008-2017 as a whole, total fatalities amounted to 174, within whom six were firemen. More recently in June 2016, two firemen died amidst a fire in mini-storage facility in Kowloon Bay, rekindling public concerns over fire safety of older industrial buildings ("IB") without up-to-date fire services installations ("FSI") like automatic sprinkler system ("ASS").
- For older commercial and domestic buildings built before 1987, legislative amendments were made since the late 1980s to enhance the fire safety standards such as mandatory requirement of ASS installation. However, as there is no such requirement for older IBs, private factories have become the second largest type of premises subject to serious fire during 2008-2017 (with a share of 13%), next only to squatters built with poorer FSI (**Figure 3**). In response, the Government introduced a Bill to tighten fire safety standard of older IBs built before 1987 in November 2018. The Bill is being scrutinized by the Legislative Council.

Fire safety of mini-storage facilities (cont'd)

Figure 4 – Distribution of mini-storages by district, end-February 2019

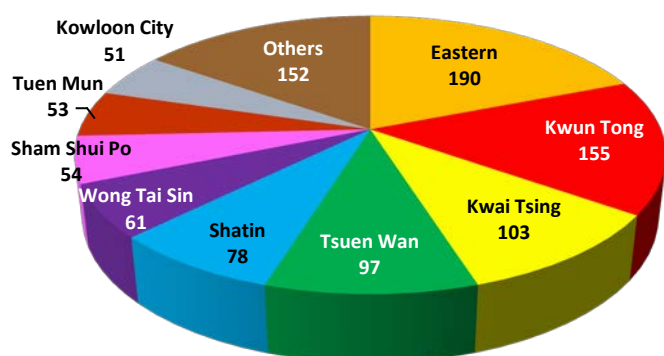


Figure 5 – Inspection of fire safety of mini-storages, end-February 2019

	FSD	BD
Total no. of mini-storages in Hong Kong	994	994
No. of mini-storages inspected	994	994
No. of mini-storages with irregularities identified upon inspection	855	854
Proportion of mini-storages with irregularities	86%	86%
Total no. of FHANs/statutory orders issued	2 978	1 815
Average FHANs/statutory orders per mini-storage facility	3.5	2.1

Figure 6 – Compliance of and enforcement against mini-storages after inspections as at end-February 2019

Compliance/Enforcement	No. of mini-storages
Total no. of mini-storages with irregularities	855
Complied with all FHANs	110
Extension of compliance time	338
No/little progress of compliance, of which:	407
- Prosecutions, of which:	129
- Convictions	19
- Pending hearing	110
- No enforcement action taken	278

Highlights

- More specifically on mini-storage facilities in IBs, market demand has ballooned in recent years, due to shrinking living space of the general public, albeit higher fire risks (e.g. maze-like partitions and narrow passageways). Immediately after the outbreak of the aforementioned fatal fire accident in June 2016, an inter-departmental working group consisting of FSD and Building Department ("BD") launched a thorough inspection of mini-storages throughout the territory. By February 2019, altogether 994 mini-storages were identified, 55% of which were located in IBs in old urban areas (e.g. Eastern, Kwun Tong, Kwai Tsing and Tsuen Wan) (Figure 4).
- These inspections aim to ensure all mini-storages to (a) comply with new fire safety standards of FSD; (b) conform to building requirements of BD; and (c) meet lease conditions of the IBs concerned by issuing Fire Hazard Abatement Notices ("FHAN") or other statutory orders. By February 2019, as many as 855 (86%) of these mini-storages were identified with fire safety irregularities, imposing fire hazard. On average, each mini-storage facility received 3.5 FHANs and 2.1 statutory orders (Figure 5).
- However, most operators find it difficult and very costly to meet the safety requirements laid down in FHANs. By February 2019, only 13% of the mini-storages concerned could comply with FHANs in full, while 40% asked for longer adjustment time for compliance (Figure 6). For the rest of 407 mini-storages with limited progress in compliance, prosecutions were brought against 129 cases. A few operators had filed applications for judicial review, challenging the safety requirements newly prescribed by FSD as "irrelevant" and "discriminated". Hence, no legal proceedings have been instituted for the rest 278 cases, pending judicial review of FHANs.

Data sources: Latest figures from Fire Services Department and Security Bureau.

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