

For information

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON SECURITY

Fire Incident in Pak Tin Estate on 13 July 2006

Purpose

This paper provides a brief account of the fire incident in a flat of Pak Tin Estate on 13 July 2006 and the discovery of a dead body in the flat on 18 July 2006. It also reports on the progress of the investigation of the incident, and the measures adopted / to be adopted to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents.

The Incident

2. At 8:14 a.m. on 13 July 2006, the Fire Services Communications Centre (FSCC) received an automatic fire alarm signal from Tsui Tin House in Pak Tin Estate. The Fire Services Department (FSD) dispatched four fire appliances from Shek Kip Mei and Mong Kok Fire Stations to attend the scene.

3. At 8:19 a.m., the officer-in-charge (a senior station officer) arrived at the scene, and found that there was smoke coming out from Room 1014 on the 10th floor of Tsui Tin House (the premises). Two security guards were attempting to extinguish a small fire in the sitting room of the premises with two hose reel jets. No person was reported missing.

4. The officer-in-charge deployed two breathing apparatus teams and one jet to tackle the fire in the premises, which was piled with miscellaneous articles. After putting out the fire at 8:27 a.m., the fire crews continued with their turning over and damping down job in the premises to prevent re-ignition. At 9:13 a.m., the fire crews handed over the premises to the attending Police officers, informing them that the premises had been checked and there had been no suspicious circumstances.

5. After being informed by the fire crews that there was nobody inside the premises, the Police guarded the premises and set out to locate the tenant, who was a visually impaired person, but to no avail.

6. In the morning of 14 July 2006, the Police decided to chain up the premises, pending the location of the tenant. In the following days, the Police had conducted periodic checks on the premises, and had also requested the staff of the Housing Department to inform them should the tenant return.

7. In response to a complaint of 'odd smell' coming out from the premises relayed by the staff of the Housing Department on 17 July 2006, Police officers attended the scene again. The premises remained chained and padlocked, with no signs of tampering. Understanding that there had been a fire inside the premises, which was full of miscellaneous articles, and that the premises had remained closed and secured after the fire, the attending officers believed that the smell was caused by the articles and therefore considered that no action was necessary.

8. On receipt of another complaint of 'odd smell' on 18 July 2006, officers from both the Police and FSD attended the scene together. The Police unlocked the premises for FSD officers' investigation. The officers discovered that there was a dead male body inside the bathroom. The body had decomposed to the extent that it was impossible to be identified by fingerprint comparison. His physical characteristics and the items found on him suggested that the deceased was the tenant of the premises.

The Investigation

9. Following the incident, FSD set up an investigation team to investigate into the circumstances leading to the fatality and the cause of the fire. Police from the Sham Shui Po District Crime Squad have also been conducting a parallel investigation into the circumstances of the death. The investigations are still in progress.

10. The outcome of the post mortem examination for determining the cause of death is pending, as the results of a toxicology examination and further examination of the tissue samples are not yet available. Once the

outcome is available, the Police will submit a death report to the Coroner for consideration on whether a death inquest is to be held.

11. FSD's preliminary investigation revealed that some of the attending crews tackling the fire incident on 13 July 2006 had not strictly followed the Operational Guidelines on Firefighting in High Rise Buildings when conducting the search and rescue. The Department will take disciplinary actions against such officers as appropriate, once it is established that they have failed to perform their duties in the incident.

Measures Adopted / to be Adopted to Prevent Recurrence of Similar Incidents

12. To prevent the recurrence of similar incidents, FSD has stepped up the training for all operational personnel with a view to strengthening the compliance with the Operational Guidelines on Firefighting in High Rise Buildings. The Department has also reminded officers-in-charge to ensure that all tasks assigned to their subordinates at the incident scene must be completed to their satisfaction.

13. FSD also plans to further enhance the fire safety awareness among the physically impaired communities. The Department had a meeting with representatives of the Visually Impaired Persons' Concern Group on 21 July 2006 to understand their concerns on the incident and fire safety issues relating to visually impaired persons. Its Community Relations Section undertakes to organise more fire safety talks and fire evacuation exercises for visually impaired persons and other physically impaired communities.

14. FSD and the Police will continue to review their procedures and practices with a view to avoiding the recurrence of similar incidents.

Security Bureau
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