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GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT

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Clerk to the Panel on Security
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8 Jackson Road
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(Attn: Mrs. Sharon TONG)

Dear Mrs. Tong,

Manpower Deployment of Fire Personnel

Thank you for your letter of 11 June 2007 requesting information relating to the deployment of fire personnel, the projected manpower requirement and whether there are plans to recruit additional fire personnel, and a comparison of the fire personnel-to-population ratio between Hong Kong and other places.

Deployment of Fire Personnel

There are various grades of civil servants in the Fire Services Department (FSD) and the Department continuously monitors the manpower situation in the various grades to ensure that there are the staff it needs for its duties. As for fire personnel, as of 1 July 2007, there were 6 111 fire personnel¹ deployed to different fire-fighting, rescue and fire protection duties as follows:

¹ "Fire personnel" refers to all members of the rank and file and the Fire Officer Grade.

- (a) 5 194 fire personnel (85% of total) deployed to the 78 land-based fire stations (excluding the Airport Fire Contingent) and six fire boat stations, which are strategically located to take into account local fire risk factors like population density; land use; age and use of buildings; etc. for frontline fire-fighting and rescue duties;
- (b) 531 fire personnel (9% of total) to the Headquarters Command which is responsible for coordination, management and planning of the Department's operations, central support and administrative services;
- (c) 257 fire personnel (4% of total) to the two Fire Protection Commands (*viz.* the Licensing & Certification Command and the Fire Safety Command) performing fire protection and prevention duties, such as formulation and certification of fire safety standards of buildings, railway systems and licensed premises; inspection of fire service installations and ventilation systems; and investigation of complaints about dangerous goods and fire hazards; and
- (d) 129 newly-recruited fire personnel (2% of total) undergoing induction training.

Projected Manpower Requirement and Recruitment of Additional Fire Personnel

The aforementioned deployment has proven to be effective for FSD to meet its pledge of responding to 92.5% of all building fire calls within six minutes in built-up areas and within nine to 23 minutes in areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments. The actual graded response time performance (GRT) in the past five years is as follows:

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
No. of total building fire calls	35 221	31 554	28 686	32 129	28 171
GRT	93.9%	94.2%	94.1%	89.2% ²	93.9%

² The RTP for 2005 was slightly affected by the initial teething problems arising from the implementation of a new computerised mobilising system put into operation since early 2005.

Despite the general civil service recruitment freeze, FSD has obtained exceptional approval in the past few years to recruit disciplined grade staff. 621 fire personnel were recruited in five years from 2002-03 to 2006-07. In 2007-08, FSD plans to recruit 151 fire personnel, 35 of which reported duty in June 2007. Further recruitment exercises are being conducted.

FSD will continue to keep in view its manpower requirements in light of the latest service needs. In view of a number of major fire incidents in recent months, the Department is looking at whether it can do its fire protection and prevention work more efficiently and effectively, with a view to reducing fire hazards in the community and improving fire safety. The Department also plans to strengthen live-fire training for frontline fire personnel to enhance their safety and professional capability. Where necessary, additional resources will be sought in accordance with the established procedures.

Comparison of the Fireman-to-Population Ratio between Hong Kong and Other Places

According to the World Fire Services Statistics compiled by the Tokyo Fire Department in 2004 below, the fire personnel-to-population ratio of Hong Kong is generally comparable to those of other metropolitan cities.

Cities	Fire personnel-to-Population Ratio
Melbourne	1 : 1579
Hong Kong	1 : 1321³
Los Angeles	1 : 1053
London	1 : 1050
Singapore (including auxiliary fire personnel)	1 : 839

³ This ratio was derived from counting all operational staff providing frontline rescue and fire-fighting services. Members posted to the Airport Fire Contingent, Diving Unit, Workshops and Fire Services Communication Centre were excluded from the computation. As at 31 December 2006, the ratio stood at 1:1302.

However, some caution is necessary in comparing the ratios, given the differences in the duties of various fire services and in the relevant circumstances of the cities.

Yours sincerely,

(Victor LAU)
for Secretary for Security