

**Opening Remarks by the Secretary for Development  
at the first public hearing on 5 May 2015 of the  
Legislative Council Public Accounts Committee on  
“Buildings Department’s Actions against Unauthorised Building Works”  
(Chapter 1 of Director of Audit’s Report No. 64)**

(English translation)

Chairman,

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Director of Audit for conducting a value-for-money audit on the Buildings Department (BD)’s actions against unauthorised building works (UBWs), and to the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Council for selecting this topic for holding public hearings.

2. The Government is very concerned about building safety. Enforcement actions taken by BD against UBWs play a key part in the Government’s efforts to enhance building safety. Yet building safety problems cannot be sustainably and effectively resolved by such actions alone. If owners do not abide by the law and disregard their legal obligations, the problem and safety risks posed by UBWs will continue to haunt us, no matter how the Government including BD strengthens its manpower and enforcement actions. If the Chairman permits, I hope to take this opportunity to make a sincere appeal to all Hong Kong citizens: for your own sake and that of others, observe the law and do not carry out UBWs.

3. Since 2010, the Government has been taking a multi-pronged approach covering legislation, enforcement, support and assistance for owners, and publicity and public education, to enhance building safety. In terms of legislation, with the rationale of “prevention is better than cure”, the Government put the statutory mandatory building inspection and mandatory window inspection schemes into full implementation in June 2012, requiring owners of aged buildings to carry out regular inspection and maintenance for their properties, in order to tackle the building dilapidation problem at its root. We also enacted the Building (Minor Works)(Amendment) Regulation 2012 to expand the scope of the Minor Works Control System to cover building works associated with sub-divided units, such that they must be carried out by qualified professionals and contractors, thereby assuring their quality.

4. To assist owners in need, we join hands with the Hong Kong Housing Society and the Urban Renewal Authority to provide them with financial and technical support on building maintenance. In particular, a number of financial assistance schemes were amalgamated into the “Integrated Building Maintenance Assistance Scheme” in 2011, offering building owners “one-stop” support. Meanwhile, with the launch of the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme, the Mandatory Building Inspection Subsidy Scheme was implemented in 2012 to assist building owners in carrying out the prescribed inspections to fulfill the statutory requirements.

5. In the long run, to raise the building safety standards, we need to develop a culture in Hong Kong that attaches importance to building safety. Through publicity and public education, we hope that all relevant stakeholders will subscribe and contribute to such culture. On top of conventional promotional and educational tools such as TV Announcements of Public Interests and posters, we also adopt a targeted promotion strategy, like organising thematic talks specifically for building owners, technical seminars for building professionals, contractors and property managers, building safety comic drawing competition for students, etc. To raise the awareness of the younger generation on the importance of building safety, we have also produced teaching kits to incorporate building safety elements into schools’ liberal studies curriculum.

6. The multi-pronged efforts since 2010 as mentioned above, and the Ma Tau Wai building collapse incident, have deepened the public understanding of UBWs. This has led to a significant increase in the number of case reports to BD, and hence an unprecedented increase of its workload. It is not quite possible to resolve all problems at the same time. In view of the sheer quantity of UBWs, BD must take a “risk-oriented” approach to prioritise its actions. Specifically, BD’s enforcement actions against UBWs are primarily taken upon receipt of reports from the public and other government departments, and by way of large scale operations targeted at various types of UBWs. In the past five years, BD dealt with nearly 200 000 reports of UBWs, issued over 80 000 removal orders, 5 000 warning notices and 20 000 advisory letters, as well as initiated over 12 000 prosecutions against non-compliant owners. These figures speak for the strenuous efforts of BD in taking enforcement actions against UBWs.

7. We agree that there is a lot of room for improvement in BD's enforcement work against UBWs. We humbly accept the various improvement recommendations of the Audit Commission in the report, and have set out therein our preliminary responses. We will take measures to implement these recommendations within practical limits. In fact, a few Audit recommendations coincide with the enhancements being undertaken by BD. For instance, BD has been revamping its Building Conditions Information System since last year to enhance its functionality and accuracy of the information. BD will study the relevant Audit recommendations in the course of the system revamp. We will also strengthen our publicity and public education efforts.

8. That said, despite the generally better understanding of UBWs by the public, there are still many owners disregarding the law and building safety out of personal benefits and convenience, and continuing to carry out or retain their UBWs without any heed to BD's warnings. As I have just said, if owners do not abide by the law and ignore building safety, it will be difficult to eradicate UBWs no matter how BD improves its operations. The safety issues of UBWs before us can only be totally resolved under the full cooperation of the Government and the citizens.

9. Chairman, my colleagues and I are happy to address Members' questions in further detail. The Director of Buildings would like to begin by giving Members a highlight of BD's enforcement actions against UBWs. Thank you, Chairman.

Ends