

**For Discussion
on 14 January 2020**

**Legislative Council
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Promotion of Green Burial**

Purpose

In recent years, the Government has been actively promoting green burial to encourage the public to handle ashes of the deceased in a more environmental friendly and sustainable manner. This paper briefs Members on the work progress of the Government on this front.

Background

2. Green burial has become more popular in recent years. In 2019, the number of green burial cases in Hong Kong (including the scattering of ashes in Gardens of Remembrance (“GoRs”) or at sea) reached 7 909, which represents an increase of over 2 500 cases (or around 47%) as compared with the figure in 2016. The relevant figures in the past four years are set out in the following table:

Year	Scattering of ashes in GoRs		Scatter- ing of ashes at sea (C)	Number of green burial cases (A)+(B) +(C)	Percentage of total number of deaths
	Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (A)	Private cemeteries ¹ (B)			
2016	4 004	462	900	5 366	11.5%
2017	4 966	607	966	6 539	14.3%
2018	5 352	722	972	7 046	14.8%
2019 (up to Nov- ember)	5 730	676	828	7 234	16.3%

¹ GoRs managed by private cemeteries include the GoR in the Junk Bay Chinese Permanent Cemetery and the GoR in the Pokfulam Chinese Christian Cemetery.

Enhancing green burial services

GoRs

3. At present, members of the public may scatter ashes of the deceased in GoRs located in the 8 columbaria² managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”). The Tsang Tsui Columbarium in Tuen Mun, which is expected to be completed in 2020, will also provide a GoR for the scattering of ashes. The design theme of this GoR, which faces the sea, will blend in with the surrounding natural environment.

4. Under a pilot scheme launched by FEHD in March 2019, a one-off paper scattering device is provided free of charge to those who scatter ashes in GoRs. Words of remembrance can be written on the device for burning after the ash scattering activity to pay tribute to the deceased.

5. At the same time, we also encourage non-governmental and religious organisations to build GoRs at suitable sites. The Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries and the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union have provided such facilities in the private cemeteries under their management. The Hong Kong Buddhist Association also plans to construct a GoR in a private cemetery under its management.

Scattering of ashes at sea

6. Apart from GoRs, members of the public may apply for scattering ashes at three designated locations³ using the free ferry service provided by FEHD or privately arranged boats. At present, free ferry service is provided every Saturday. To facilitate the public to pay tribute to the deceased at the waters where ashes were scattered, FEHD arranges four memorial sailings each year, including two before the Ching Ming Festival and two before the Chung Yeung Festival.

7. To further enhance public awareness of the service of scattering ashes at sea and step up promotion of green burial, FEHD launched another trial scheme in April 2019 to invite the public to visit the service of scattering ashes at sea at no charge. During these visits,

² These columbaria are located at Cape Collinson, Diamond Hill, Wo Hop Shek, Fu Shan, Kwai Chung, Cheung Chau, Ping Chau and Lamma Island. The most-recently built GoR in Kwai Chung was opened in early 2019.

³ The three designated locations are at the east of Tap Mun, east of Tung Lung Chau and south of West Lamma Channel.

which are organised on a monthly basis, dedicated staff will introduce the service to the visitors.

Mobile application and thematic website

8. In June 2010, FEHD launched the Internet Memorial Service (“IMS”) which provides a free memorial website (www.memorial.gov.hk) for users to create memorial webpages for their deceased loved ones and family members and to pay tribute to them at any time and from anywhere. As at end of 2019, the IMS has accumulated about 11 400 users, about 14 100 memorial pages and over 4.95 million hit counts. In June 2018, a mobile application of the IMS was launched. Its functions include personalised profile settings, message notifications and social media sharing. The public can pay tribute to their deceased family members and friends at any time and from anywhere with their mobile devices. As at end of 2019, the mobile application of IMS was downloaded 3 538 times.

9. In March 2018, FEHD launched a new thematic website “Green Burial” (www.greenburial.gov.hk). With a clear and simple webpage design, relevant information was provided under three main themes, namely scattering of cremains in GoRs, scattering of cremains at sea and the IMS. Information on application procedures, locations of GoRs, designated areas for scattering of ashes at sea and free ferry services, as well as promotional materials, etc. have been uploaded to the website for public browsing.

Central register

10. The Government launched a central register in January 2019 to encourage the public to plan in advance their after-death arrangements by registering their wish for green burial and making it known to their families⁴. Registration is free of charge and application can be submitted online, by post, by fax or by email. If a deceased person with his or her wish registered is identified on the register upon cremation booking by the family members, FEHD will follow up appropriately with the deceased person’s family members. As at the end of 2019, more than 3 400 members of the public registered their wish for green burial. We will continue to promote the central register.

⁴ Even if there is no prior registration, descendants can still choose green burial for the deceased.

Handling of abortuses

11. We are improving the arrangements for handling abortuses. The Government commissioned its first facility for keeping abortuses in Wo Hop Shek in Fanling in April 2019. Meanwhile, we plan to provide similar facilities in Cape Collinson in Eastern District, Shek Mun in Sha Tin District and Sandy Ridge in North District. FEHD will also provide a dedicated cremation facility for abortuses at a site near the Kwai Chung Crematorium⁵.

12. We are also grateful to private cemeteries for their co-operation. The Tsuen Wan Chinese Permanent Cemetery, the Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Cape Collinson and the Tao Fong Shan Christian Cemetery have provided services of keeping abortuses. Furthermore, FEHD is processing similar applications from the Hong Kong Buddhist Cemetery in Cape Collinson and the Muslim Cemetery in Happy Valley.

Stepping up promotion of green burial

13. At present, a number of non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) are assisting with the promotion of green burial when providing advisory and information services to the elderly on after-death arrangements. FEHD will arrange these NGOs and other elderly centres/homes to visit GoRs managed by FEHD and visit the service of scattering ashes at sea. In 2019, FEHD organised over 110 visits to green burial facilities and services for some 3 200 visitors.

14. Besides, FEHD has been distributing leaflets, booklets and DVDs containing promotional videos on green burial to the after-death service units of relevant government departments/NGOs, green groups, day care centres and homes for the elderly, etc. FEHD has also established contact with some 40 hospitals for distribution of booklets/leaflets on green burial to the public. Hyperlinks to FEHD’s thematic webpage of green burial have been set up under the websites of some government departments and NGOs.

15. FEHD will continue to increase publicity for green burial through different channels, including broadcasting Announcement in the Public Interest on television, radio and online platforms, producing

⁵ Besides the cremation facility, other facilities include a garden for scattering the cremated ashes of abortuses, a room for holding memorial activities and electronic kiosks.

promotional videos, displaying posters and banners, launching mobile application and dedicated website, conducting exhibitions and talks at tertiary institutions, collaborating with NGOs and running promotional activities at senior exhibitions, etc. Information on green burial can be obtained on FEHD's website or at its cemeteries and columbaria offices. Banners promoting green burial services will continue to be displayed at conspicuous locations in various government venues and public places.

16. As a standing arrangement, the Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre of FEHD located in the Kowloon Park in Tsim Sha Tsui provides an exhibition area with multi-media display equipment for promotion of green burial. To promote green burial to young people, the Centre includes green burial messages in its school talks. In 2019, 12 school talks were conducted, reaching out to some 400 students. To outreach to the general public, FEHD has been conducting regular roving exhibitions at public housing estates since October 2017. Green burial messages are disseminated through broadcasting videos and distributing leaflets at the promotion booths set up there.

17. To enhance the promotion of green burial, the Government will continue to construct more GoRs. These include the Tsang Tsui Columbarium in Tuen Mun to be completed in 2020, as well as the Shek Mun Columbarium in Sha Tin and the Sandy Ridge Columbarium in the North District which are scheduled for completion in 2023 and 2024 respectively. Digital worshipping facilities will be provided at these new GoRs⁶.

18. The Government will plan for new GoR facilities with larger scale and more space⁷, featuring unique landscape designs in future. These new GoRs will allow the ashes of the deceased to blend in with the natural environment and return to nature. They will also offer peaceful ambience for visitors in remembrance of their family members and friends. Moreover, we will adopt innovative ideas and make reference to the contemporary designs and experiences of other places to study and introduce more diversified forms of ash scattering, as well as designs of memorial plaques and installations which are solemn, decent and modern, etc.

⁶ Four electronic kiosks are provided adjacent to the new portion of the Kwai Chung Garden of Remembrance which was opened in 2019. This digital worshipping facility is the first of its kind in GoRs managed by FEHD.

⁷ The existing GoRs are ancillary facilities of various columbaria. Owing to physical constraint, they can only provide limited space for the scattering of ashes. The public may not find these small gardens ideal for green burial.

19. The Government will continue to consider the views of the public and the stakeholders⁸, enhance the relevant facilities and services, and step up publicity and education. It will also encourage the public to accept green burial as an option for post-death arrangement. In the long run, it is our hope that green burial will be widely accepted by the public as a form of handling cremated ashes that is in line with the beliefs of a complete and blissful life returning to nature. The Government understands that this process takes time, but we will put in persistent efforts with a view to bringing about the change of social norms and conventions gradually.

Advice sought

20. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and offer views on the promotion of green burial.

Food and Health Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
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⁸ Two questionnaire surveys are being conducted by FEHD to gain a better understanding of the views of the public on green burial. One survey is on the ways the users of cremation service handled the cremated ashes in the past few years, and the other is about public views on green burial. The findings of these two surveys, which are expected to be completed in the first half of 2020, can serve as reference for formulating a long-term policy on green burial services by the Government.