

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 20

(Written Reply)

Date of meeting : 23 October 2002

Asked by : Hon LAU Kong-wah Replied by : Secretary for Housing,
Planning and Lands

Question

Regarding the clearance of unauthorized rooftop structures and rehousing of the tenants concerned, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the progress and timetable of clearance of unauthorized rooftop structures;
- (b) of the current percentage of unauthorized rooftop structures with potential fire hazards in the total number of such structures;
- (c) whether it has studied how to expedite the clearance of unauthorized rooftop structures so as to minimize fire hazards;
- (d) of the respective numbers of such tenants who have and those who have not been allocated public rental housing ("PRH") units in each of the past three years; and the reasons for not allocating PRH units to some of the tenants; and
- (e) whether, in view of the current social and economic climate, it will review the eligibility criteria for allocating PRH units to such tenants?

Reply

Madam President,

- (a) It is the Government's policy to accord priority to tackle unauthorized rooftop structures (URS) with potential fire hazards. In single-staircase buildings, roofs serve as fire refuges. Therefore, URS constitute potential fire hazards as they may obstruct the escape routes. According to the results of a territory-wide survey of all

private buildings in Hong Kong by the Fire Services Department in 1998, there were about 4,600 single-staircase buildings with URS.

To eliminate such fire hazards in this kind of buildings, the Buildings Department (BD) intends to clear all URS in single-staircase buildings. From January 1999 to August 2002, BD already cleared the URS on about 1,000 single-staircase buildings. The URS on the remaining 3,600 single staircase buildings will be cleared by phases. The whole exercise is expected to be completed by 2007.

As regards other URS, we will promptly demolish unauthorized building works which pose immediate danger or are newly-erected.

- (b) We have not collected statistics of URS on other buildings. Hence, we are not able to provide the percentage of URS with potential fire hazards in the total number of URS.
- (c) In April 2001, the Government implemented the “Comprehensive Strategy for Building Safety and Timely Maintenance” which includes, inter alia, expediting the clearance of URS with potential fire hazards. The target is to systematically clear those URS by 2007. To prevent the problem from proliferation, newly erected URS will be removed promptly.
- (d) In the past three years, a total of 2,074 families occupying rooftop structures were affected by the Buildings Department’s enforcement actions. Of these, 353 families were re-housed to public rental flats. The reasons for not re-housing the remaining 1,721 families to public rental flats are as follows:
 - (i) some of the families did not meet the occupancy requirement of having lived in their rooftop structures from 1982. Though not eligible for public rental housing, these families were re-housed to Interim Housing while waiting for their turn for public rental housing. This arrangement ensures that no one

will be rendered homeless as a result of Government's enforcement actions while maintaining fairness in the allocation of public rental housing through the Waiting List;

- (ii) some families had opted to purchase flats under the Home Ownership Scheme or the Home Purchase Loan Scheme, or had opted for cash allowances in lieu of public rental housing;
- (iii) the incomes or assets of some families had exceeded the prevailing means eligibility limits for public housing and hence were not in need of subsidised housing;
- (iv) some families possessed domestic property and were hence ineligible for public housing;
- (v) some families were already registered tenants of public rental housing; or
- (vi) some families had alternative accommodation or had moved out voluntarily upon Buildings Department's enforcement action.

A breakdown of the re-housing arrangements for the 2,074 affected families is set out at the **Annex**.

- (e) The current eligibility criteria for public rental housing are set with a view to ensuring rational allocation of public housing resources to those in genuine need, especially those households with limited means. Residents of rooftop structures are encouraged to apply for public rental housing through the Waiting List. The average waiting time is currently less than three years. Upon clearance, residents of rooftop structures who have already registered on the Waiting List will be allocated a public rental flat if their turn on the Waiting List is expected to mature within the next 12 months. They will also enjoy an upgrading of the choice of districts, i.e. those applying for public rental housing in the New Territories can be allocated flats in the

extended urban area, while those applying for public rental housing in the extended urban area can be offered flats in the urban area.

The Housing Authority reviews the eligibility criteria for public rental housing from time to time taking into consideration all relevant factors including current economic situation. Those not meeting the re-housing eligibility criteria but are beset with special social and medical problems are re-housed to public rental housing on the recommendation of the Director of Social Welfare.

**Re-housing Arrangements for Families Occupying Rooftop Structures
affected by Buildings Department's Enforcement Action**

Re-housing Arrangements		2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003 (up to 30/9/2002)	Total
Number of households re-housed to public rental housing		115	161	77	353
Number of households who had been given other re-housing arrangements	Interim Housing	153	174	134	461
	Participation in subsidized home ownership scheme, or receipt of cash allowance in lieu of public rental housing	28	36	13	77
Number of households not given re-housing arrangements		381	449	353	1,183
<u>Total</u>		677	820	577	2,074