

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 15

(Written Reply)

Date of meeting : 25 June 2003

Asked by : Hon Fred LI Replied by : Secretary for Housing,
Planning and Lands

Question

At present, when occupants of private residential premises suspect that the water seepage problem at the ceilings of their premises has been caused by damaged pipes in the premises on the upper floors, they may request the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department to send its staff to conduct dye testing in those upper floor premises in order to identify the source of water seepage. However, as the staff concerned are often refused entry to the upper floor premises, and are thus unable to conduct such tests, the water seepage problem often drags on for years, and in the end the affected occupants can only resort to protracted and complicated civil proceedings. As the authority is launching a clean Hong Kong campaign at full blast, will the Government inform this Council whether :

- (a) it has assessed the impact of pipe seepage and leakage in private residential premises on environmental hygiene; if it has, of the assessment results;
- (b) it will introduce testing methods which are based on new technologies to enable easier and more precise identification of the source of water seepage; and
- (c) it will devise a mechanism to facilitate expeditious and easy solutions to such problems?

Reply

President,

Water seepage in the ceilings of private buildings is basically an issue of building management and maintenance. In general, the building owners should engage a professional to submit a report on the source of water seepage to facilitate resolution of the problem through negotiation with the party causing the ceiling water seepage.

As a precaution, the Government from time to time impresses on the public the importance of building management and maintenance. Owners are reminded of their responsibility to carry out regular maintenance of water pipes, drainage pipes and waterproof membranes to prevent water seepage. For cases involving public hygiene, building safety and wastage of water, the Government would exercise its statutory powers, including the power of entering the premises concerned for investigation, to handle the water seepage problem.

The replies to the three parts of the question are as follows.

- (a) Based on the Government's experience of handling cases of water seepage complaints, water seepage problems (including pipe seepage and leakage) usually occur in older multi-storey buildings and involve individual units of adjacent floors. While water seepage may cause inconvenience to or create nuisance for individual residents, in the majority of cases it does not create serious environmental hygiene problems for the buildings.
- (b) To improve the methodology for identifying the source of water seepage, we have commissioned a consultancy study on the technologies for rapid detection of water seepage sources. The consultant will also formulate technical guidelines on the scope and types of investigation works on water seepage for the use of Government departments and building professionals. The consultancy study commenced in late 2001 and the study report is now being drafted. We will consider the recommendations of the consultancy report and their feasibility carefully upon completion of the report.

- (c) As mentioned above, building owners should resolve the water seepage problem through negotiation with the parties causing the ceiling water seepage. If the seepage involves the common areas of the building, owners may seek assistance from the owners' corporations or the building management companies. If the seepage causes environmental hygiene problems, wastage of water or structural safety problems, the Government already has an established mechanism for taking follow-up actions in light of the circumstances of the case. Under the existing mechanism, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department may issue "Nuisance Notices" to require the parties concerned to rectify the hygiene problem caused by water seepage; the Buildings Department may require the parties concerned to repair defective drainage pipes; and the Water Supplies Department may require the parties concerned to repair defective fresh water pipes. The specific actions required have to be determined according to the nature of the case.