

7 August 2019

Internal Circular No. 10/2019

**Departmental Work Arrangements in times of
Tropical Cyclones and Rainstorms**

The Department has reviewed the departmental work arrangements during tropical cyclones and rainstorms in the light of the updated guidelines promulgated by CSB Circular Memorandum No. 9/2019. This Circular announces the updated departmental work arrangements. It supersedes Internal Circular No. 9/2013 and should be read in conjunction with *Departmental Standing Instruction No. 1/2006*.

Precautions

2. When a tropical cyclone or rainstorm approaches, Branch/Section Heads should take appropriate precautions in their offices and staff should observe carefully the guidelines laid down in this Circular.

Working hours

3. The opening hours of the Department are from 8:45 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday. Since the Department has been adopting the “*Staggered Working Hours System*”, except with the exceptional approval from the Deputy Commissioner or the respective Assistant Commissioners, staff with conditioned working hours of 44 per week are allowed to work in four starting and finishing time slots while those with conditioned working hours of 45 per week are allowed to work in two time slots. Details of these time slots are set out in *Departmental Standing Instruction No. 1/2006*. For the purpose of this Circular, working hours refer to the working hours of the respective officers under the staggered working hours arrangement. In the case of staff working on special shifts (e.g. field staff who finish work at 10:00 p.m.), working hours refer to their specific work span.

Dissemination of Information

4. Upon receipt of advice on the issue of a Tropical Cyclone Warning

Signal or Rainstorm Warning Signal during working hours, the Administration Branch will notify colleagues within the Department by internal email. Officers nominated by Branch Heads to disseminate information on Tropical Cyclones and Rainstorms to their respective Branches should promulgate instantly the information to all staff within their Branches. A list of the nominated officers is at *Annex A*. Branch/Section Heads should arrange staff to inspect the premises occupied by their Branches/Sections and take appropriate precautions to prevent Government property from being damaged.

Staff Release Arrangements

5. It is the responsibility of all officers to attend for duty during working hours, or when required by the Department, regardless of the occurrence of Tropical Cyclones or Rainstorms. The general guidelines on staff release set out in the ensuing paragraphs should be followed.

Tropical Cyclones

6. The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) issues different Tropical Cyclone Warning Signals according to the level of threat, so as to alert the public to take necessary precautionary measures and to ensure a state of readiness within the essential services to deal with possible emergencies. Where possible, it will issue an early alert (i.e. a “Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement”) within two hours of the hoisting of the No. 8 Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal.

(a) Warning issued outside of working hours

7. When a Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement or the No. 8 or higher Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal is issued and remains in force **outside of working hours**, staff need not report for duty while the Announcement or the Signal remains in effect.

(b) Warning issued during working hours

8. When a Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement or the No. 8 or higher Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal is issued **during** working hours, Branch/Section Heads may release staff on a staggered basis as set out in *Annex B*. As a general guideline, staff who are relatively less mobile physically and staff who have a comparatively long, or difficult, or indirect journey from the workplace to home should be arranged to leave first.

9. Directorate staff and Branch/Section Heads should form the “**core**” staff to oversee departmental operation and the smooth release of staff during the Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement. They should, in general, be among the

last batch of staff to leave the office upon the hoisting of the No. 8 or higher Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal.

10. Branch/Section Heads should ensure that the operation of their Branches/Sections is adequately maintained during the Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement and until the issue of the No. 8 or higher Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal. They should closely monitor weather reports and the state of public transport; apply the staggered release arrangement flexibly and exercise discretion in releasing staff, taking into account the personal circumstances and needs of individual officers, including the actual travelling distance and complexity of the journey between their workplace and residence, and genuine personal needs to go off duty quickly. It is advisable to err on the side of caution to ensure that staff members who are released later are not stranded or endangered by any delay in their going off duty, bearing in mind personal safety of staff is of utmost concern. Branch/Section Heads should also ensure that those staff who prefer to stay in their office, which is safe, during the No. 8 or higher Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal because of personal circumstances, adverse weather conditions or lack of public transport, are allowed to do so.

11. Branch/Section Heads should draw up lists of their staff who will be released at different phases. These lists should be updated regularly to take account of staff changes or other changes as appropriate.

(c) Staff engaged in outdoor duties

12. For staff engaged in outdoor duties, the following guidelines are applicable:

- (i) When No. 1 Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal is hoisted, they may, subject to (iii) below, proceed with their normal outdoor duties but should keep themselves informed of the progress of the cyclone.
- (ii) When No. 3 Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal is hoisted, they may, subject to (iii) below, proceed with their normal outdoor duties unless/until they consider that the weather conditions at their place of work are too dangerous to perform normal outdoor duties. In this event, they should return to the office if weather conditions permit. Otherwise, they should take shelter temporarily and inform their supervisors as soon as practicable.
- (iii) On the hoisting of any Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal, they should **not** proceed for outdoor duties in outlying districts which are only accessible by sea transport.

For the purpose of (ii) above, whether or not prevailing weather conditions are

too dangerous to perform normal outdoor duties is a matter of personal judgement of the staff “on the spot”. Whilst all reasonable steps should be taken to see that their duty is carried out, staff are not expected to endanger their lives to do so.

(d) Warning lowered during working hours

13. Generally speaking and subject to the circumstances set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 below, when the No. 8 or higher Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal is cancelled or lowered to No. 3 or below two hours or more before the end of working hours of the respective officers, staff should report for duty as soon as practicable, having regard to weather and traffic considerations. Circumstances under which staff have to report for duty are set out at *Annex C* for illustrative purpose.

14. In the event that the Government has announced to the public that, due to certain extreme conditions, employees should be advised to stay in their places or safe locations for another two hours (or longer if extended) (refers as “extreme condition”) after the No. 8 Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal has been lowered, instead of heading for resuming work immediately, staff should follow the advice.

15. There may be circumstances where staff may experience delay or difficulty in reporting for duty after a tropical cyclone such as where there are road flooding or blockage, landslides or heavy rain, serious disruption to/suspension of public transport services, etc., they should report to their supervisors by telephone for instructions as soon as practicable, and supervisors should give due consideration to the circumstances of individual affected staff and handle each case with flexibility. For the avoidance of doubt, not requiring the staff to take leave for the absence from work in such situation is one of the discretions that supervisor may flexibly exercise after taking into consideration the genuine circumstances of the individual staff. It is, however, not a matter of course that supervisors must take.

Rainstorms

16. The HKO issues different Rainstorm Warning Signals - Amber, Red or Black - according to the level of anticipated rainfall, for the purpose of alerting the public about possible flooding, traffic congestion, etc. and alerting the essential services to be in a state of readiness to deal with possible emergencies.

(a) Amber or Red Rainstorm Warning

17. As a general guideline, when the Amber or Red Rainstorm

Warning is issued **before** working hours, staff need to report for duty as usual. For staff living in remote areas or areas affected by particularly heavy rain, they may be unable to report for work or have difficulty in reporting for work. In this case, the staff concerned must inform their supervisors by telephone as soon as practicable; and supervisors should give due consideration to the circumstances of individual affected staff and handle each case with flexibility.

18. When the Amber or Red Rainstorm Warning is issued **during** working hours, staff working indoors should remain on duty as usual and stay where they are unless it is not safe to do so. For staff working outdoors in areas exposed to rain, the supervisors concerned should consider suspending outdoor work of their staff if weather conditions so warrant. They should advise staff to take shelter temporarily and resume duty when weather conditions permit.

19. Branch/Section Heads may, having regard to the personal circumstances of individual staff, the weather and road traffic conditions at the material time, etc., exceptionally release those staff who have a genuine need to go off duty when the Amber or Red Rainstorm Warning is issued during working hours. Release of staff during Amber or Red Rainstorm Warning should be approved only on an exceptional basis, rather than as a matter of rule. When the Amber or Red Rainstorm Warning remains in effect at the end of working hours, staff should be allowed to go off duty as usual.

(b) Black Rainstorm Warning

----- 20. When the Black Rainstorm Warning is issued and remains in force **outside of** the working hours, staff need not report for duty while the Warning is in effect. As a general rule, when the Black Rainstorm Warning is issued outside working hours and is cancelled or replaced by a lower level alert two hours or more before the end of working hours of the respective officers (please see *Annex C*), staff should report for duty as soon as practicable, having regard to weather and traffic considerations. For staff who experience delay or difficulty in resuming duty, they must report to their supervisors by telephone for instructions as soon as practicable; and supervisors should give due consideration to the circumstances of individual affected staff and handle each case with flexibility.

21. When the Black Rainstorm Warning is issued **during** working hours, staff working indoors should remain on duty and stay where they are unless it is not safe to do so. They should not leave the office until their working hours are over. Staff working outdoors in exposed areas should stop work and take shelter immediately. They should resume work as soon as practicable after the Warning has been cancelled or replaced by a lower level alert and the weather conditions so permit.

22. Branch/Section Heads may, having regard to the personal circumstances of individual staff, the weather and road traffic conditions, etc., exceptionally release those staff who have a genuine need to go off duty when the Black Rainstorm Warning is issued during working hours.

23. When the Black Rainstorm Warning remains in effect at the end of working hours, staff should be allowed to go off duty as usual. However, they should exercise due care when going outdoors and watch out for the latest weather information and traffic conditions, including any disruption to public transport services. Branch/Section Heads should make arrangements to ensure that the office remains open for those staff who decide to remain in the office and await an improvement in the weather or traffic conditions if they wish.

Office Security

24. Staff should pay attention to office security at all times and in particular before leaving the office during the Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement, No. 8 Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal and Rainstorm Warning. Files and documents should be returned to filing cabinets as far as possible and electronic office equipment should be put away from places where water seepage is likely to occur.

Damage by Tropical Cyclones and Rainstorms

25. It is the responsibility of Government officers to protect Government property during Tropical Cyclones and Rainstorms. All officers who happen to be in the office during the Tropical Cyclone or Rainstorm must exercise their own initiative and judgement to protect the office premises and property from being damaged as far as possible, but they are not expected to endanger their lives in doing so. Where a damage has occurred or seems likely to occur, they should report by telephone to their respective Branch/Section Heads who will decide on the actions to be taken.

Inspection of Offices

26. As soon as the Tropical Cyclone or Rainstorm has passed, Branch/Section Heads should inspect their offices and report to the Departmental Secretary any damage that requires attention.

Circulation

27. Branch/Section Heads should arrange to re-circulate this Circular to all staff **every three months and each time this Circular is updated** to ensure that their staff are fully acquainted with the work arrangements.

Branch/Section Heads should **also bring the content of this Circular to staff who have newly joined.**

Enquiries

28. Enquiries on this Circular should be addressed to the Deputy Departmental Secretary (Administration) at 2582 4963 or Senior Clerical Officer (General) at 2582 4806.



(Mrs Grace Wong)
Departmental Secretary

To : Branch and Section Heads - for circulation to staff under their charge

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ACs

(A Chinese version of this circular is available)