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Government undertakes comprehensive follow-up on Tai Po fire (with photos/video)

A Government spokesman said today (November 27) that, in view of the No. 5 alarm fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po that has caused multiple casualties, the Chief Executive convened another cross-departmental meeting this morning to co-ordinate all policy bureaux and departments, actively advancing the response efforts in four key areas: extinguishing the fire and rescuing trapped residents, treating the injured, providing post-incident support, and conducting a comprehensive investigation.

In terms of rescue efforts, among the eight buildings in Wang Fuk Court, the fires in seven affected blocks are largely under control. The Fire Services Department (FSD) is continuing its full effort to complete the search and rescue and firefighting operations on the remaining floors. During the fire, the FSD received 346 requests for assistance and has handled 296 of them.

On medical support, the Primary Healthcare Commission co-ordinated professionals from the public and private medical sectors, including over 250 doctors and more than 250 other healthcare professionals from the private sector, to set up medical stations at all temporary shelters. The medical stations provide appropriate medical assistance for residents in need from 8am to 8pm daily, including basic medical assessments and referral services, treatment of mild injuries, drug prescriptions (including necessary medication refills based on one's medical history), and psychological support, with a view to assisting in managing non-emergency medical needs.

As for post-incident support, the Chief Executive has instructed the Civil Service Bureau to activate the "Government-wide Mobilisation" mechanism to ensure sufficient manpower for all necessary follow-up actions. Meanwhile, all government-organised celebratory events will be cancelled or postponed, and officials will reduce attendance at non-essential public activities to focus on relief and recovery efforts. The Government will arrange memorial activities, including flying flags at half-mast at government buildings, holding memorial services and setting up condolence books to allow the public to express their sorrow and condolences. Further details will be announced later.

To meet the short- and medium-term accommodation needs of affected residents, the Government has opened nine shelters, which are currently being used by over 500 residents. The Home and Youth Affairs Bureau has contacted youth hostels and hotels, which will provide around 1 000 units for affected residents to stay in immediately for one to two weeks. The Government is also co-ordinating resources for transitional housing and dedicated rehousing units from the Hong Kong Housing Society, with an estimated 1 800 units to be made available later to meet the accommodation needs of the affected residents.

In addition, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has mobilised social workers, clinical psychologists and support staff to provide "one social worker per household" assistance to affected residents, including emotional support, financial assistance, and residential care and occasional child care services. The SWD will maintain close

liaison with relevant government departments to provide all necessary assistance to those affected.

The Education Bureau (EDB) immediately contacted the school heads associations in Tai Po and schools near Wang Fuk Court to co-ordinate class suspension arrangements for the affected schools. It also deployed staff to the temporary shelters to provide emotional support for affected students. The EDB will maintain close communication with the school heads associations and schools in the district, and continue to provide them with necessary assistance and support services.

Starting tonight, the Government will provide an emergency cash subsidy of HK\$10,000 to each affected household to offer immediate relief. At the same time, the Government has established the "Support Fund for Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po", allocating HK\$300 million as start-up capital to assist residents and support all relevant work. The fund began accepting donations from 7pm this evening. Its designated bank accounts at the Bank of China (Hong Kong) are: HKD donation account 012-875-2-190159-7 and foreign-currency donation account 012-875-2-190160-7, enabling contributions from all sectors of the community to support the victims.

As for funeral arrangements for the deceased, if affected residents require cremation services or columbarium niches, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will make special arrangements and provide full support.

Regarding investigations, Police arrested two male directors and a male engineering consultant of a construction company in the small hours today. They are being detained for further enquiries. Police have also seized for further inspection materials at the scene that may not have met regulatory standards. Once the fire is extinguished and on-site safety is confirmed, Police will co-ordinate with the FSD to gather evidence and conduct a thorough investigation to ascertain the cause of the fire.

Separately, the Buildings Department (BD) and the Independent Checking Unit of the Housing Bureau today issued a letter to all registered building professionals and registered contractors requiring them to review relevant records or test certificates relating to fire retardant properties of the protective nets and the like used in scaffolds for ongoing projects (buildings under construction or existing buildings under maintenance). They must submit a report to the BD within seven days, after which the BD will conduct audit checks. At the same time, the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) has required contractors of building projects under public works contracts to review and submit the above-mentioned information within seven days. The ArchSD will also conduct audit checks.

The BD also launched today a special operation to inspect in batches all existing buildings that are currently undergoing external wall renovations with scaffolding and protective nets. The BD will proactively check the records or test certificates relating to fire retardant properties of the protective nets and the like used in scaffolds, and collect samples for testing. Regarding sample testing, the Government is also appealing for assistance from the Mainland to enhance testing capacity.

The registered contractor responsible for the maintenance works at Wang Fuk Court is currently involved in 11 other private residential building projects. The BD inspected the relevant sites today and will take any appropriate follow-up action.

In addition, the Development Bureau (DEVB) today met with the industry to discuss the roadmap for advancing the replacement of bamboo scaffolding with metal scaffolding. At the meeting, the DEVB also requested the industry's co-operation with the above-mentioned inspection and audit checks. The BD will review the relevant requirements, guidelines and legislation regulating the erection of scaffolding (whether metal or bamboo) and associated protective nets, and will consider whether there is a need for strengthening or enhancement.

As at 8pm today, the No. 5 alarm fire in Tai Po has resulted in 65 deaths and 77 injuries, including one fireman among the deceased. To better co-ordinate the follow-up actions, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has established three working groups, namely an inspection and regulatory working group led by the Chief Secretary for Administration, an emergency assistance and fundraising working group led by the Deputy Chief

Secretary for Administration, and an emergency residential arrangement working group led by the Deputy Financial Secretary, and has been actively taking forward the relevant work.

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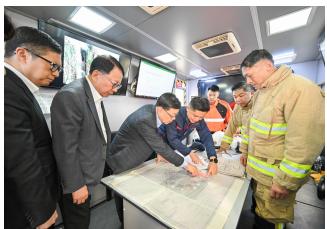
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Photo



Audio / Video

CE inspects fire scene at Tai Po Wang Fuk Court

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