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Government departments go all out to fight No. 5 alarm fire in Tai Po

A Government spokesman said today (November 27) that, in view of the No. 5 alarm fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po that had caused multiple casualties, the Chief Executive convened an interdepartmental urgent meeting yesterday afternoon (November 26). The Government's Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre was activated immediately and officers from relevant departments closely monitored the situation in real time, co-ordinating efforts to strive to alleviate the impact of the fire.

Various government departments and units are making every effort on multiple fronts: the top priority is extinguishing the fire and rescuing trapped residents; the second is treating the injured; the third is providing post-incident support, offering assistance to the families of the deceased, the injured, and affected residents; and the fourth is conducting a thorough investigation to determine the cause of the fire.

The Fire Services Department (FSD) received reports at 2.51pm yesterday that a fire broke out at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po. Fire services personnel arrived speedily at 2.56pm and discovered that the scaffolds outside the building had caught fire, and that the fire had spread to the interior and other buildings. Firefighting and rescue operations began immediately. The fire was upgraded several times and reached No. 5 alarm at 6.22pm yesterday.

Currently 11 jets and eight turntable ladders are deployed at the scene for water spraying, and 26 search and rescue teams are handling assistance calls at scene. During the operation, the FSD has dispatched over 200 fire appliances and about 100 ambulances, and mobilised over 1 200 fire and ambulance personnel.

Police officers immediately set up a command post upon arrival and mobilised over 1 000 personnel to co-ordinate residents' evacuation, rescue operations and emergency support.

Police officers also directed traffic at the scene and surrounding areas, implementing road closures, traffic control measures and diversions to facilitate rescue operations. Police will adjust road closure areas and special traffic arrangements as necessary taking into account rescue operations. Motorists are urged to exercise patience and follow instructions from officers at scene.

Moreover, a casualty enquiry hotline has been set up by the Police. If members of the public suspect their relatives or friends are missing in relation to the fire incident, please call the Police hotline on 1878 999.

During the operation, the Auxiliary Medical Service has deployed six ambulances and 33 personnel to provide on-site treatment and transport the injured to hospitals.

Upon notification by the FSD about the incident, the Hospital Authority immediately activated the Major Incident Control Centre to co-ordinate contingency measures, with the accident and emergency departments of nine public

hospitals (including Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital, North District Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital, Pok Oi Hospital, Princess Margaret Hospital, Queen Mary Hospital and United Christian Hospital) having been alerted to standby to receive the casualties. Among them, the three acute hospitals in the New Territories East Cluster (i.e. Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital and North District Hospital) in the New Territories East Cluster along with their accident and emergency departments and other departments such as intensive care units and burn units, mobilised their full resources for rescue efforts.

Meanwhile, North District Hospital and Prince of Wales Hospital also dispatched personnel to the incident site to help triage and provide initial treatment to patients. As the incident involved a number of patients, the burn centres of Queen Mary Hospital and Prince of Wales Hospital, as well as the hyperbaric oxygen therapy centre of Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital, were prepared for the incident to receive patients anytime.

In response to need for evacuation involving residents of Kwong Fuk Estate, staff members of the Housing Department and the management company concerned have provided assistance to residents on-site. The Housing Bureau and the Housing Department have also been maintaining close contact with the Home Affairs Department and the Social Welfare Department to provide full assistance to the affected residents, including arranging the residents of Wang Fuk Court and Kwong Fuk Estate in need to reside in transitional housing, interim housing or transit centres.

The Tai Po District Office (TPDO) has opened eight temporary shelters for residents in need and has arranged shuttle bus services for residents. As at 9.30pm yesterday, about 900 persons are using the shelters. The TPDO will continue to closely monitor the situation and open more shelters as necessary.

The TPDO has deployed all 19 Care Teams across the district to provide support, while the Sha Tin District Office (STDO) nearby and its Care Teams have also provided cross-district support. Care Teams in other districts will also be mobilised to provide appropriate support. The TPDO, STDO and North District Office have also set up interdepartmental help desks at Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital and North District Hospital to provide assistance and handle public enquiries. The TPDO will provide assistance to families of the deceased and injured in their applications for the Emergency Relief Fund or the Special Aid Fund, as well as liaise with various assistance funds operated by other charitable organisations.

The Social Welfare Department has deployed social work officers and supporting staff to the help desks and shelters for provision of assistance to the residents. Besides, the Civil Aid Service also mobilised over 100 personnel to assist with the operation of the temporary shelters. In addition, medical social workers are also providing emotional support to the injured persons and their families. Through liaison by the TPDO, the Hong Kong Red Cross deployed personnel to the temporary shelters to provide emotional support and medical assistance to people in need. The Health Bureau has also arranged for the "18111 - Mental Health Support Hotline" to step up its manpower to handle calls from people with needs for emotional support in relation to the fire. Moreover, support information on coping with stress or negative emotions has also been posted to "Shall We Talk" social media channels.

The Buildings Department (BD) has long been implementing strict requirements on the use of fire retardant protective nets, screens, tarpaulins, plastic sheeting and the like for scaffolds to prevent the spread of fire should a fire occur. Last month, the BD issued a circular letter to all registered building professionals and registered contractors, urging them to inspect and ascertain that the protective net and the like used in their construction projects are in compliance with the recognised standards in terms of fire retardant capability.

Wang Fuk Court is a sold property under the Home Ownership Scheme (HOS). The works are carried out by Prestige Construction & Engineering Company, Limited, a registered contractor hired by the Incorporated Owners of the HOS court. The Independent Checking Unit of the Housing Bureau (ICU) exercises building control over the works in accordance with the Buildings Ordinance. Regarding the fire incident, the ICU will conduct an investigation. If any violations of the requirements of the Buildings Ordinance are found, the case will be referred to the BD for

handling in accordance with the ordinance, including prosecution or disciplinary proceedings.

In response to the fire incident, the BD and the ICU will also carry out special operations targeting ongoing construction projects. Registered building professionals and registered contractors will be required to review relevant records or test certificates relating to fire retardant properties of the protective nets and the like used in scaffolds, and submit their reports to the relevant departments.

As at midnight, the fire has resulted in 36 deaths and 36 injuries, including one fireman among the deceased. The FSD is making every effort to extinguish the fire, which is gradually under control. Staff from various government departments will continue to fulfil their duties diligently, fully engaging in response and relief work, as well as providing appropriate support to citizens in need.

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