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## THE CHALLENGES OF THE HONG KONG FIRE SERVICES DEPARTMENT

**Abstract.** Hong Kong is a Special Administration Region of the People's Republic of China. As far as the Hong Kong Fire Services Department is concerned, there are about ten thousands uniformed and civilian staff. The primary roles of the Department are:

- to protect life and property in the event of fire and any other calamity,
- to advise the public on fire protection, and
- to provide emergency ambulance service for the sick and the injured.

In respect of firefighting, it can be observed that the number of real building fires has been diminishing in Hong Kong. It results from the benefit of advanced technology and increased fire safety awareness of the public. However, it sounds out an alarm of possible degrade in practical firefighting skill among serving firefighters. To confront this challenge, the Hong Kong Fire Service Department has been taking proactive efforts in fostering and promoting the operational efficiency and safety of the firefighters through live fire training.

As mentioned before, one of the core duties of the Department is to advise the public on fire protection. A number of measures have been taken to enhance fire safety awareness of the public and promote a fire safety culture. First of all, a scheme known as the Fire Safety Ambassador (FSA) has been launched since 1997. In addition, a Building Fire Safety Envoy Scheme has been devised since 2008. Furthermore, a 4-pronged approach (Publicity; Enforcement; Checking; and Partnership) has been introduced. Moreover, a fire safety promotional programme has recently been launched at kindergartens. Finally, 'Hot Strike Campaign' is being conducted.

As regards emergency ambulance service, the demand of ambulance service is ever increasing. For this reason, the Department has been progressively providing simple Post Dispatch Advice (PDA) for ambulance calls involving various kinds of injuries. What is more, a study of the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS), is being conducted. Furthermore, the Department has launched the School Outreaching Scheme.

To conclude, it is believed that the Department will continue to further enhance the quality of services, step up its fire safety education and publicity efforts, strengthen the training of Service members in order to make Hong Kong a more secure and safer place to live and work.

**Keywords:** fire services, protect life, fire protection.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to share with you the challenges of the Hong Kong Fire Services Department. I know that many of you have not visited Hong Kong before. Therefore, I would like to, firstly, briefly introduce this vibrant Asia World City so that you all could have a better understanding of what Hong Kong is like before I talk about our organization and work in Hong Kong.

### **About Hong Kong**

Hong Kong is a Special Administration Region of the People's Republic of China. It is located in the south-eastern coastal region of China and is often referred to as the gateway to China. Hong Kong has a total area of about 1 100 square kilometers with a population of about 7,3 million, the majority of which congregate on about 16% of our land. As land is at a premium, we have no alternative but to develop upwards. The tallest building in Hong Kong is the International Commerce Centre being a building of 118-storey, ranking the 4th highest building in the world.

### **Organisation of the Hong Kong Fire Services Department**

Talking about the organization and work of the Hong Kong Fire Services Department, we have about ten thousands uniformed and civilian staff. Commanding the Department is the Director of Fire Services. The primary roles of the Department are to protect life and property in the event of fire and any other calamity no matter it happens on land or on sea, to advise the public on fire protection and to provide emergency ambulance service for the sick and the injured. We also formulate and enforce building fire safety provisions in collaboration with other government departments. There are altogether 80 fire stations, 38 ambulance depots and six fireboat fire stations in Hong Kong. They are strategically located to provide an emergency response for all areas. The graded response times for building fire calls are six minutes for built-up areas and nine to 23 minutes for areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments. For emergency ambulance services, the target response time is 12 minutes. The performance target is to achieve these response times in 92,5% of all calls. In 2012, we responded to over 37 000 fire calls, 30 000 special service calls and 720 000 ambulance calls. The conditioned working hours of the operational staff in the Fire Stream is 54 hours. Our firefighters are working on a 24-hour on and 48-hour off duty shift pattern. As you can imagine, the challenges for the Hong Kong Fire Services Department are basically dense population leading to high life risk in buildings and the ever increasing demand of emergency ambu-

lance services owing to the aging population. Increasing public expectation for quality services is also another challenge. I will share with you the measures we take forward to managing these challenges according to our core duties in respect of firefighting, fire protection and ambulance services.

## **Firefighting**

Without controversy, firefighting and rescue in high-rise building fires is more difficult and risky as compared to that in low-rise building. Tasks such as locating and tackling the fire, conducting search and rescue, evacuating occupants and effecting ventilation can become very different, complicated and challenging. The level of challenge and risk generally varies directly with the building height and the complexity of internal layouts. But on the other hand, with the benefit of advanced technology and increased fire safety awareness of the public, the number of real building fires has been diminishing in many of the developing and developed cities. While it is encouraging to see similar trend in Hong Kong, it also sounds out an alarm of possible degrade in practical firefighting skill among serving firefighters. Such degrade not only hampers the operational efficiency of the public life saving mission, but also increases the possibility of firefighters' mishap on the occasion of fire. To confront the mentioned challenges, the HKFSD has been taking proactive efforts in fostering and promoting the operational efficiency and safety of the firefighters through live fire training. On the other hand, standard operating procedures pertinent to high-rise firefighting and rescue are under constant review. Among the recently conducted reviews, a 'Search and Rescue (SAR) Group Strategy consolidating various practical firemanship skills, inter alia, fire suppression and smoke management has been implemented. The paramount objectives of the SAR Group Strategy are to expedite search and rescue operation in a safe and systematic manner, especially when the fire incidents involve multiple assistance calls.

## **Fire Protection**

In respect of fire protection, I trust you share my belief of prevention is better cure. In this regard, I would like to share with you the Hong Kong experience in engaging partnership with the community to proactively address fire safety problems, in particular the old buildings. Our empirical experience suggests that partnership with the community is a key factor to success in enhancing fire safety awareness of the public and promoting a fire safety culture. All parties including the fire authority, the Administration and the community should join

hands to make the place we live and work a safer one. Indeed, the safety of building occupiers cannot be much improved without a high sense of fire safety awareness. To this end, we launched a scheme known as the Fire Safety Ambassador (FSA) since 1997. The aim of the Scheme is to provide basic fire protection training to enrich the fire safety knowledge as well as elevate the fire safety awareness of the public. We also stepped up fire safety publicity to educate members of the public on “What to do in case of fire”. In addition, in a bid to enhance fire safety management of building, we have devised a Building Fire Safety Envoy Scheme since 2008. Under the Scheme, building owners / occupiers / management staff are invited to join the Scheme as Envoys. A 1,5-day theoretical and practical training course would be provided to them. Upon completion of the training, the Envoys will be able to disseminate fire safety messages to the occupants of their buildings; assist in organizing fire drills; inspect and report fire hazards; and ensure that the fire services installations of their buildings are properly checked every year by Registered Contractor. We have also introduced a 4-pronged approach to enhance fire safety in composite and residential buildings, particularly in the old and congested districts with a view to tackling the persisted fire safety problems in these buildings which are usually not properly managed. The 4-prongs are: Publicity; Enforcement; Checking; and Partnership. From our experience, those target buildings in which fire hazards of various natures used to be persistently present can achieve vast improvements after having undergone the 4-pronged approach. Fire safety concepts instilled into the minds of young children will have a long lasting effect. As such, a fire safety promotional programme was recently launched at kindergartens in order to foster the correct fire safety concept for pre-school children. The programme facilitates the input of vivid fire safety messages to kids in kindergartens through voluntary Fire Safety Educators recruited from FSD members. Meanwhile, we also conduct ‘Hot Strike Campaign’ aiming at strengthening the publicity and education on fire safety in the community. Frontline fire personnel take the opportunity to promote the fire safety education at the scene immediately in the aftermath of a fire with a view to enhancing the awareness of fire safety in the neighbourhood while their memory of the fire is still fresh.

### **Ambulance Services**

Apart from the challenges we are encountering in firefighting and fire protection domains, we are also facing challenges in providing ambulance services to the public. As I have mentioned earlier, the demand of ambulance service is ever increasing. To this end, a number of measures have been taken to address the problems in addition to increase our supply of service. Since May 2011, the Department has been progressively providing simple Post Dispatch Advice

(PDA) for ambulance calls involving bleeding; bone fractures and dislocation of limbs; burns; convulsion; heat exposure and hypothermia. We are also conducting a study of the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) in which ambulance response would be prioritized in accordance with the degree of urgency of calls. We also launch the School Outreaching Scheme to educate youngsters on the importance of proper use of emergency ambulance service and to enhance their general first aid knowledge. In conclusion, we will continue to further enhance the quality of services, step up its fire safety education and publicity efforts, strengthen the training of Service members and take their professionalism up a notch. We review the existing tools and equipment from time to time and actively look for products of a higher quality with a view to bringing in equipment that are more efficient, safer and of a higher standard. With the collective efforts of the Government and the community of Hong Kong as a whole, we will make our city a more secure and safer place to live and work.

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## WYZWANIA DLA ODDZIAŁU STRAŻY POŻARNEJ W HONG KONGU

### Streszczenie

Hong Kong to specjalny region administracyjny Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej. Działający w Hong Kongu oddział straży pożarnej liczy około dziesięć tysięcy pracowników mundurowych i cywilnych. Jego podstawowe funkcje to:

- ochrona życia i mienia na wypadek pożaru i innych nieszczęść,
- udzielanie informacji i doradztwo w zakresie ochrony przeciwpożarowej oraz
- zapewnienie pogotowia ratunkowego dla chorych i rannych.

Analizując pierwszą z głównych funkcji hongkońskiej straży pożarnej, a mianowicie gaszenie pożarów, można zauważyć, że rzeczywiste pożary budynków występują coraz rzadziej. Przyczynami tej sytuacji są dobroczynne skutki zaawansowanych technologii oraz zwiększone poczucie świadomości społecznej na temat bezpieczeństwa pożarowego. Niemniej jednak taki stan rzeczy może mieć negatywny wpływ na rozwój praktycznych sprawności i umiejętności strażaków w zakresie gaszenia pożarów. Aby sprostać temu wyzwaniu, hongkoński oddział straży pożarnej podejmuje aktywne działania ma-

jące na celu rozwój i promowanie efektywności operacyjnej i bezpieczeństwa strażaków poprzez szkolenia o tematyce pożarniczej.

Jak wspomniano wcześniej, jednym z podstawowych obowiązków oddziału straży pożarnej w Hong Kongu jest udzielanie społeczeństwu informacji i rad na temat ochrony przeciwpożarowej. Podjęto szereg środków w celu zwiększenia świadomości społeczeństwa o bezpieczeństwie pożarowym, jak również promowania kultury bezpieczeństwa pożarowego. Opracowano i wprowadzono następujące programy: *Fire Safety Ambassador* (istniejący od 1997 roku), *Building Fire Safety Envoy Scheme* (od 2008 roku), 4-płaszczyznowe podejście (Rozgłos; Wprowadzenie w życie; Sprawdzenie; oraz Partnerstwo). Ponadto, program promujący bezpieczeństwo przeciwpożarowe został niedawno zapoczątkowany w przedszkolach. Ostatecznie, kampania pod nazwą *Hot Strike Campaign* jest obecnie prowadzona.

Mając na uwadze ostatnią z podstawowych funkcji straży pożarnej w Hong Kongu, faktem jest, iż zapotrzebowanie na usługi medyczne świadczone przez pogotowie ratunkowe jest coraz większe. Z tego powodu hongkońska straż pożarna zaczęła być stopniowo odpowiedzialna za dostarczanie prostych rad dotyczących różnego rodzaju urazów podczas połączeń z transportem medycznym (system *Post Dispatch Advice*). Poza tym prowadzone jest badanie o nazwie *Medical Priority Dispatch System*, w szkołach natomiast został uruchomiony program znany jako *School Outreaching Scheme*.

Podsumowując, oddział straży pożarnej w Hong Kongu pragnie dążyć do poprawy jakości swych usług, intensyfikować edukację dotyczącą bezpieczeństwa pożarowego, jak również dbać o rozwój szkoleń dla pracowników służby pożarniczej. Zadania te mają być prowadzone w celu zwiększenia bezpieczeństwa życia i pracy społeczności w Hong Kongu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** straż pożarna, ochrona życia, ochrona przeciwpożarowa.