

LCQ 20: Lifeguard services

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joseph W P Wong, in the Legislative Council today (June 15), on behalf of the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, who is on leave:

Question:

Regarding the lifeguards employed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, will the Government inform this Council of:

(a) the respective numbers of drowning swimmers at public swimming pools and beaches since last year and, among them, the number of those drowned, as well as the number of cases in which other forms of assistance were sought from lifeguards in the past five years;

(b) the respective average years of service among the lifeguards who are employed on pensionable terms and those who are employed on various contract terms, and whether it has assessed if lifeguards' years of service, work experience and familiarity with the environment are relevant to their performance in rescuing drowning swimmers;

(c) the measures in place to ensure that there is an adequate number of experienced lifeguards on duty at public swimming pools and beaches during the swimming season; and

(d) the respective average numbers of swimmers at various public beaches in early mornings before lifeguards were on duty in the past year; whether it will consider advancing the lifeguard service hours at public beaches with relatively more swimmers in early mornings, so as to better safeguard the safety of swimmers?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The number of rescue and fatal cases happened at public swimming pools and bathing beaches between January 1, 2004 and May 31, 2005 during service hours are 324 and three respectively. The respective numbers of rescue, fatal, and give-a-hand cases where no rescue operation is required (e.g. helping exhausted swimmers to leave water) happened at public swimming pools and bathing beaches during service hours in the past five years are set out below:

Bathing beaches

Year	Rescue	Fatal	Give-a-hand
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			(no rescue operation is required)
2001	151	1	589
2002	162	0	732
2003	190	5	751
2004	148	2	1 054
2005	25	0	141
(up to May)			

Public Swimming Pools

Year	Rescue	Fatal	Give-a-hand
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			(no rescue operation is required)
2001	161	2	1 508
2002	172	0	1 700
2003	96	3	1 535
2004	128	0	1 812
2005	23	1	417
(up to May)			

(b)and(c) As at June 1, 2005, all Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD)

lifeguards under permanent establishment have served the Department for six or more years. More than half of them have over 11 years of experience. The majority of the full year contract lifeguards have served the Department for three or more years. About half of them have six years of experience or more. For the seasonal contract lifeguards recruited in this swimming season, around 75% have worked with LCSD for more than one swimming season.

All the lifeguards working with LCSD, irrespective of whether they are under permanent establishment or on contract terms, possess valid Beach Lifeguard Awards or Pool Lifeguard Awards issued by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society. Moreover, all LCSD lifeguards are required to go through an induction training course after recruitment and carry out mobilisation practice on rescue operation at the aquatic venues regularly. Therefore, all lifeguards are well qualified to carry out their work. In addition, LCSD will deploy suitable number of experienced lifeguards at each aquatic venue. As most lifeguards are deployed to work in designated aquatic venues throughout the swimming season, they can familiarise themselves with the environment of the venue in a short period of time.

(d) We do not have statistics on the number of early swimmers at bathing beaches before the lifeguard service was available last year. However, LCSD has carried out surveys on the number of early swimmers at selected bathing beaches with more early swimmers this year. The result shows that most morning swimmers arrive at the beaches at about 4am to 5am and most of them will leave the beaches by 7am. As a whole, the majority of beach swimmers arrive after 9am. Hence, LCSD provides lifeguard service between 9am and 6pm when the number of swimmers is comparatively higher. Nevertheless, LCSD also extends the lifeguard service hours for bathing beaches by two hours, i.e. from 8am to 7pm on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays between June and August to strengthen lifeguard service during the peak swimming season.

If swimmers choose to swim at the bathing beaches outside the service hours, they should swim in company with other swimmers, pay attention to the weather condition and be aware of their own health condition.

Ends/Wednesday, June 15, 2005

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