

LCQ20: Free provision of air conditioning for venues in community halls/community centres

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Following is a question by the Hon Lau Kong-wah and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 8):

Question:

At present, organisations of specified categories may be exempted from the charges for hiring venues in the community halls (“CHs”)/ community centres (“CCs”) of the Home Affairs Department for organising non-profit-making activities. However, the authorities have set different rules for various CHs/CCs about the provision of free air conditioning at the venues therein. Generally, the authorities will provide free air conditioning only when the outdoor temperature is 25.5°C or above and a certain number of persons using the venue has been reached. I have received complaints from many members of the public that when taking part in the active activities held in CHs/CCs by these organisations, they often found it stuffy inside and felt short of breath, and some of them even collapsed as a result. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it will review the relevant rules and consider providing free air conditioning at CH/CC venues hired by such organisations for energetic activities or on humid days?

Reply:

Madam President,

The management of the community halls (CHs)/community centres (CCs) under the Home Affairs Department (HAD) mainly rests with the respective CH/CC Management Committees. These Committees usually comprise a wide cross-section of the district community, such as District Councillors, district personalities, members of Mutual Aid Committees and school representatives. Detailed rules governing the hiring and use of CHs/CCs are drawn up by the Management Committees, having regard to guidelines on exemption of hiring charges for use of CHs/CCs issued by HAD, their district needs and the need for effective use of resources.

Generally speaking, non-profit-making organisations hiring CHs/CCs for non-profit-making activities may apply for exemption of hiring and air-conditioning charges. To ensure effective use of resources, some Management Committees have prescribed certain conditions for using air-conditioning in CH/CCs, such as specifying a certain indoor temperature and the minimum

number of participants.

In the interests of environmental protection and conserving global resources, the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (SETW) has since October 2004 adopted an internationally accepted standard requiring all government premises to maintain a room temperature of 25.5°C during summer months. Where there are essential operational needs, SETW also allows departments to maintain their premises at a lower room temperature. In keeping with the requirement, HAD has asked that the indoor temperature of all CHs/CCs be kept at this level during the summer months and in carrying out their day-to-day management duties at CHs/CCs, District Office staff have been advised to take into consideration the nature of the activity, e.g. energetic activity, the number of participants when setting the room temperature of CHs/CCs. Where considered appropriate, they could set the room temperature below 25.5°C. This measure not only conserves energy but also ensures that the venues are maintained at an acceptable room temperature.

End/Wednesday, November 8, 2006