

LCQ18: Lifeguard services

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 7):

Question:

Regarding the provision of lifeguard services at public swimming pools and beaches under the management of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), will the government inform this Council:

(a) of the respective numbers of rescue cases (where rescue operation was required), fatal cases and give-a-hand cases (where no rescue operation was required) which happened at public swimming pools and beaches during service hours in each of the past three years;

(b) of the details of the cases in the past five years in which individual swimming pools/the entire swimming complexes and beaches were closed because some lifeguards took unscheduled leave, including the dates, duration and areas of closure, as well as the estimated number of swimmers affected and the number of affected organisations which had booked swimming lanes or pools;

(c) of the progress in the recruitment of lifeguards by LCSD in recent months, including a breakdown by the mode of appointment (i.e. permanent establishment and various contract terms) of the recruitment targets, the number of lifeguards recruited so far, the average years of experience among those recruited, the ratio of male to female and the percentage of those who have worked at public swimming pools or beaches before; whether LCSD will consider further raising the pay levels of lifeguards to bring them back to the pre-1998 levels; and

(d) given that it has been reported that the existing establishment of lifeguards is below the international standard, and public swimming pools will be opened to the public free of charge between July and September this year, how LCSD ensures that there will be adequate number of on-duty lifeguards at all public swimming pools and beaches even if some lifeguards take unscheduled leave, and whether LCSD will consider recruiting more lifeguards (instead of deploying honorary lifeguards who are inexperienced) to stand in for the lifeguards who take leave?

Reply:

Madam President,

My reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(a) The total number of rescue cases, fatal cases, give-a-hand cases and accident cases (such as injuries on land) is 8 682 in the past three years. The details are as follows:

	2005	2006	2007
	----	----	----
1. Rescue Cases			
(a) Swimming Pools	111	121	123
(b) Beaches	181	142	128
Total:	292	263	251

2. Fatal Cases

(a) Swimming Pools	2	1	0
(b) Beaches	1	5	1
Total:	3	6	1

3. Give-a-hand Cases

(a) Swimming Pools	1 532	1 389	1 488
(b) Beaches	808	627	599
Total:	2 340	2 016	2 087

4. Accident Cases

(a) Swimming Pools	326	352	329
(b) Beaches	130	139	147
Total:	456	491	476

(b) The details of the cases in the past five years in which swimming facilities were closed temporarily because of unscheduled leave taken by lifeguards are provided in the following tables. The lifeguards took unscheduled leave mainly because they were not feeling well.

1. The number of times part of the facilities were closed temporarily or the size of the swimming zones of beaches were reduced temporarily

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	----	----	----	----	----
(a) Swimming Pools	307	404	469	336	294
(b) Beaches	0	0	1	1	7
Total:	307	404	470	337	301

2. The number of times swimming facilities were affected

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	----	----	----	----	----
(a)Swimming Pools					
*Diving Pools	157	220	257	215	167
*Leisure Pools	98	149	178	96	107
*Teaching Pools	98	86	107	46	42
*Training Pools	32	12	33	12	9
*Children's Pools	16	14	26	7	10
*Main/Secondary Pools	0	2	3	1	2
Total:	401	483	604	377	337

(b)Beaches

* Size of the swimming zones was reduced	0	0	1	1	7
Total:	0	0	1	1	7

3. The number of hours part of the facilities were closed temporarily

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	----	----	----	----	----
(a) Swimming Pools					
Total number of hours for the whole year	2292	2453	2704	1922	1561
(b) Beaches					
Total number of hours for the whole year	0	0	9	9	63

4. Estimated number of affected swimmers

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	----	----	----	----	----
(a) Swimming Pools	9 000	9 700	14 400	7 500	6 900
(b) Beaches	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not affected	Not affected	Not affected

5. Total number of affected pool lanes which had been booked

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
----	----	----	----	----
0	0	0	4	20

6. Total number of affected organisations which had booked the swimming pools

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
----	----	----	----	----
0	11	9	1	6

*Note: The above figures do not include those related to the temporary closure of swimming pool and beach facilities as a result of the industrial actions taken by lifeguards in 2004 and 2005.

(c) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) started a recruitment exercise for lifeguards to be appointed on civil service terms in early January this year. It is expected that more than 290 persons will be recruited. The recruitment exercise is still in progress. Moreover, about 900 "seasonal lifeguards" will be recruited for the swimming season in 2008. Out of the about 590 seasonal lifeguards presently appointed on contract terms, around 75% of them had been appointed before in last year's recruitment exercise while 80% of them had worked at public swimming pools or beaches under the Department. The ratio of male to female among these lifeguards is roughly 9: 1.

The pay scale of lifeguards appointed on civil service terms will be handled in accordance with the Pay Adjustment Mechanism for the Civil Service. As for lifeguards appointed on non-civil service contract terms, the LCSD will conduct a review regularly just as in the past by taking into account relevant factors such as the salary movements in the lifeguard market, the financial position and manpower requirement of the Department, etc. to decide whether the pay scale should be adjusted and determine the range of adjustment.

(d) Despite the fact that individual swimming pool management organisations overseas may have set their staffing standard for lifeguards, there is not a unified international staffing standard for lifeguards because of the variations among swimming pool facilities and the modes of use all over the world. The LCSD's staffing standard was set in 2004 after a working group composed of members including the representatives from the Hong Kong Life Saving Society and the Department's staff had carried out site inspections of the venue facilities and listened to the views of staff. On top of this, a review of the staffing arrangements for swimming pools and beaches is also conducted by the LCSD every year to meet operational needs.

The number of users of swimming pools is expected to be higher than normal between July and September this year when public swimming pools will be open to the public free of charge. The LCSD has already planned to recruit additional lifeguards for that period so as to strengthen the life saving service at swimming pools. Moreover, arrangements will also be made just as in the past for inviting honorary lifeguards from the Hong Kong Life Saving Society to be on duty at swimming pools.

Ends/Wednesday, May 7, 2008