



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Public access to information scheme well received

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Since the Code on Access to Information was introduced on March 1, 97 formal requests for information were received by the first nine Government departments and branches to which it applies.

These initial nine departments and branches are the Architectural Services Department, Customs and Excise Department, Government Supplies Department, Highways Department, Home Affairs Department, Social Welfare Department, Home Affairs Branch, Recreation and Culture Branch, and Works Branch.

Of the 97 requests for information received up to 11 April, 60 were met, one was refused and one was withdrawn. Another 16 requests were still being processed, nine were referred to other departments for follow-up action and 10 oral requests were required to be confirmed in writing.

The Social Welfare Department received the largest number of requests for information (24), followed by the Home Affairs Department (16) and the Highways Department (14).

The contents of the requests were wide-ranging. They included requests for copies of performance pledges and organisation charts of departments, Legislative Council and District Board membership lists, slope stability reports, standards and guidelines on street lighting, traffic accident compensation, lists of subvented organisations, social welfare payment eligibility criteria, and information on old age allowances and centres for the elderly.

A spokesman for the Government Efficiency Unit which developed the Code and is responsible for its implementation, said he was pleased that the scheme had been so well received by members of the public.

"Much of the information which had been released in response to requests would not have been accessible to the public before the Code was introduced," the spokesman said.

"Some initial nervousness has been replaced by willing acceptance, and in some cases enthusiasm for the new arrangements on the part of the Government agencies already covered by the Code, and those to be covered in future," he added.

One surprising fact was that of all the requests for information so far received, only one was identifiably from a media organisation.

"While this could indicate that existing informal avenues for gaining access to Government information continue to be adequate, elsewhere in the world the media are major users of formal access to information schemes.

"We hope that the media would make use of the Code, and would also play a role in informing the public at large of this avenue for gaining access to information held by the Government.

"The Government is publicly committed to extending the Code's coverage to all its departments by the end of 1996, and is now considering how this can be done as quickly as possible," the spokesman said.

Attention News Editors:

For further enquiries, please contact Mr David Weeks, Deputy Head (SD) of the Efficiency Unit, on 2656 2331; or Mr Chan Tat-kuen, Principal Executive Officer (SD) of the Unit, on 2565 8213.

End/Friday, April 14, 1995

Licensing Office for Elderly Homes Operational

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The former Registration Office of Private Homes for the Elderly of the Social Welfare Department has been restructured and renamed the Licensing Office of Residential Care Homes for the Elderly (LORCHE) from April 1 to cope with the implementation of the related legislation.

The Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance, with the exception of Section 6, has come into operation on April 1 this year.

"With the implementation of the Ordinance, residential care homes for the elderly have to comply with the licensing requirements on location, space, design, structure, safety, fire precautions, staffing and quality of care to the residents before they are allowed to operate," said the SWD's Senior Social Work Officer (LORCHE), Mrs Loretta Chau.

"The new legislation aims to regulate homes established for residential care of elderly persons who have attained the age of 60 years so as to ensure that these homes provide services of a reasonable standard and that the well-being of the elderly residents is safeguarded," she said.

"Although the LORCHE only came into existence in April, we have been very busy during the past few months in preparing all the logistics to set up the new office.

"The new office is formed by strengthening manpower in the social work stream on the one hand and by injecting new blood seconded from the Buildings Department and Fire Services Department on the other," Mrs Chau said.

At present, the LORCHE has an establishment of 31 officers comprising social workers, building surveyors, senior station officers and clerical support.

Mrs Chau said with multi-disciplinary professionals working under the same umbrella, it was hoped that the licensing office could handle and process applications more efficiently and effectively.

"If we do not have our own expertise in the fields of building safety and fire safety, whenever we receive an application we have to seek professional advice from other departments on every occasion.

"Such a practice is time-consuming and involves a lot of paper works. The new arrangement certainly helps speeding up the processing of applications," she said.

Apart from handling applications, Mrs Chau said staff members of the LORCHE are prepared to meet prospective applicants who might have queries about the new legislation and the applications formalities.

"Appointment for a meeting can be made by letter or through the duty officer of the LORCHE on 2961 7211 or 2834 7414," she added.

Any persons who are interested in operating residential care homes for the elderly or operators of existing homes who wish to apply for a licence or a certificate of exemption are welcome to contact the LORCHE located at Room 2354, 23rd floor, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai.

End/Friday, April 14, 1995

Bus-only lane scheme benefits passengers

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The bus-only lane scheme on the approaches to Tate's Cairn Tunnel proved effective in reducing journey times for public transport commuters without significantly affecting other traffic.

Commenting on the effectiveness of the scheme which was introduced in late December last year, a spokesman for the Transport Department said average bus journey times observed have been reduced by more than two minutes between Siu Lek Yuen Road and the Tate's Cairn Tunnel toll area, representing a significant reduction of 19 per cent in journey time.

The bus-only lane scheme is in force between 7 am to 10 am daily except Sundays and public holidays.

"At the same time, queue lengths of traffic observed in the before and after periods did not change much although there was initial fluctuation. The loss of road space given to the bus-only lane scheme has not reduced the southbound throughout of the Tate's Cairn Tunnel during the morning peak hours. The flow still exceeds 3,000 vehicles per hour which is the Tunnel's oneway practical capacity," he said.

About 100 franchised buses and up to 30 non-franchised buses use the bus-only lanes under the scheme benefiting about 12,000 passengers.

The spokesman said the scheme was introduced as part of the response to addressing mounting public complaint about delays to public transport between the New Territories and Kowloon.

It comprises three separate lengths of bus-only lanes on the approaches to the Tate's Cairn Tunnel: one on the left hand approach lane to the toll lane area, one in the middle lane along Siu Lek Yuen Road at the junction with its slip road to the Tate's Cairn Tunnel, and one on the left hand lane along Siu Lek Yuen Road approaching Sha Tin Wai Road.

The spokesman said since the introduction of the scheme, the Transport Department had monitored the traffic impact but the intervening Christmas and the Chinese New Year holiday periods and then the completion of the reconstruction of the Lion Rock Tunnel Road have all had some effect on traffic flows.

"Now that traffic has had chance to settle down, before and after comparisons of journey times and queue lengths have been made and indicate that the resultant impact of the bus-only lane scheme gives overall positive benefits," the spokesman said.

End/Friday, April 14, 1995

More safety officers required

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Building contractors and shipyard owners are reminded today (Saturday) that more safety officers will be required on construction sites and shipyards when the Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Safety Officers and Safety Supervisors) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulation 1994 becomes effective on June 11, 1995.

Chief Factory Inspector of the Labour Department, Mr Chan Tat-king, said under the amended regulation, a contractor who has 100 or more employees on his construction site is required to engage a full-time safety officer.

In the existing regulation, only a site with 200 or more employees needs to have a full-time safety officer.

Although shipyards are not covered by the present regulations, the Amendment Regulation will require a shipyard owner to employ a full-time safety officer if he has 100 or more employees in his shipyard.

"Where 20 or more persons are employed in a shipyard, the owner has to employ a safety supervisor," Mr Chan added.

The Amendment Regulation also requires the owner to display in a conspicuous place in his industrial undertaking a notice with his own name and the particulars of the responsible safety officer or safety supervisor.

"Anyone who fails to comply with these legal obligations will be prosecuted and liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000," he cautioned.

End/Saturday, April 15, 1995

Latest review of cigarette tar and nicotine yields released

The Government's latest review of tar and nicotine yields of cigarettes has shown that the average tar and nicotine yields of the 108 brands surveyed were 13.2 milligrams (mg) and 0.93 mg per cigarette respectively.

Releasing the findings today (Saturday), a spokesman for the Health and Welfare Branch pointed out that the average tar and nicotine yields of cigarettes had been decreasing consistently over the past years.

The respective figures published in the first review in 1984 were 17.6 mg/cigarette and 1.36 mg/cigarette. When compared to 1993, the average tar yield reported in the present review (covering January to December 1994) has decreased by 0.1 mg/cigarette while that for nicotine yield has increased by 0.1 mg/cigarette.

Under the Smoking (Public Health) Regulation, cigarettes are classified into four tar groups according to their determined tar yields:

low tar	0 to 9 mg/cigarette
low to middle tar	10 to 14 mg/cigarette
middle tar	15 to 17 mg/cigarette
high tar	18 to 20 mg/cigarette

Out of the 108 brands of cigarettes surveyed, 23 brands were in the low tar group, 33 brands in the low to middle tar group, 40 brands in the middle tar group and 12 brands in the high tar group.

All 108 brands of cigarettes reported in the present Table carried on their packets and cartons a tar group designation as claimed by their manufacturers.

But 13 brands were found to have declared tar groups inconsistent with test findings with 12 of them being under-reported and one over-reported.

The spokesman explained: "Manufacturers may continue to sell the cigarettes using the previous designation for a period of 12 months.

"If the determination made by the Government Chemist for any brand of cigarettes differs by not more than one mg from the previous one and has the effect of placing the cigarettes in a tar group other than that to which they would have belonged, the brand may continue to use its previous designation subject to the Director of Health's written approval."

He said the Government is currently reviewing the maximum permissible level of tar and nicotine contained in cigarettes so as to reduce smokers' exposure to these harmful substances.

"However, the best way to protect health and prevent smoking-related illnesses is to quit smoking or never to start it at all," he said.

End/Saturday, April 15, 1995

March weather report

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March was dry in terms of rainfall. The monthly rainfall of 32.4 millimetres was 52 per cent below the March average.

This was according to a monthly weather report released by the Royal Observatory today (Saturday).

The total rainfall recorded in the first quarter of 1995 was 86.6 millimetres, 37 per cent below the normal of 138.3 millimetres for the same period. The month was also marginally cooler than normal with a mean air temperature of 17.9 degrees.

Under the influence of a moist easterly airstream, the first day of the month was cloudy and cool with rain. More rain fell the next day but skies cleared on March 3 as a dry northerly airflow reached the territory. Fine and dry weather continued the following day with strong winds persisting in the early morning. A pedestrian was hurt by a blown-down sign board at Lai Chi Kok.

It gradually became milder and more humid from March 5 to 10 as the continental airstream subsided. Another surge of cool and moist northeast monsoon arrived at the South China coast on the night of March 10. Overcast, cool and humid conditions prevailed until March 15.

With the monsoon moderating, widespread sea fog occurred on March 16 and the visibility fell below 1 000 metres inside Victoria Harbour during the morning. Foggy conditions persisted the next morning and three reported incidents of ship collision occurred. Among these, two catamarans collided 500 metres southwest of Tsing Yi Island and 14 passengers were injured.

With the arrival of a cool northerly airflow that afternoon, fog dispersed and the temperatures dropped rapidly to the month's minimum of 12.5 degrees on the early morning of March 18.

The weather remained cloudy on March 19 but turned mainly fine in the next couple of days as winds became light.

Thick fog again hampered sea traffic and three more cases of ship collision were reported on the morning of March 22 with one person injured. It was fine that afternoon but became generally cloudy the next day.

Apart from some morning fog, the weather was fine and warm on March 24. The month's highest temperature of 25.2 degrees was reached in that sunny afternoon.

A cold front over South China advanced south and reached the coast during the morning of March 25. Strong gusty winds affected the offshore areas and a fishing boat capsized in squally showers near Tap Mun. One woman was drowned and a man was reported missing in the incident. Two students were also injured when their canoes overturned in rough seas at Sai Kung.

The strong and cool northeast monsoon also lowered the temperatures by about four degrees in two hours at the Royal Observatory. Rain quickly eased off that afternoon and the weather became generally fine and dry during the next couple of days.

It was cloudy from March 28 to 30. Mist was reported over the territory almost the whole day on March 29. A cool northeast monsoon reached the territory and brought occasional rain on the last day of the month.

No tropical cyclone activity was observed over the western North Pacific and the South China Sea in the month of March.

Details of the issuance/hoisting and cancellation/lowering of various warnings/signals in the month are summarised in Table 1.1. Monthly meteorological figures and departures from normal of March are tabulated in Table 1.2.

Table 1.1 Warnings and signals in March

Warnings/Signals	Effective date and time
Strong Monsoon Signals	3 Mar 2200 - 4 Mar 0930 25 Mar 1200 - 26 Mar 0800
Thunderstorm Warning	17 Mar 1030 - 17 Mar 1330
Fire Danger Warnings	
Yellow	5 Mar 0600 - 6 Mar 0605 19 Mar 0600 - 19 Mar 2315 26 Mar 0000 - 26 Mar 0600
Red	4 Mar 0600 - 5 Mar 0600 26 Mar 0600 - 27 Mar 0600

Table 1.2 Figures and Departures from Normal - March

Total Bright Sunshine	80.5 hours; 15.9 hours below normal
Mean Daily Global Solar Radiation	9.72 MJ/SQM, 1.52 MJ/SQM below normal
Total Rainfall	32.4 mm; 34.5 mm below normal
Mean Cloud Amount	79 per cent; 3 per cent above normal
Mean Relative Humidity	78 per cent; 3 per cent below normal
Mean Daily Maximum Temperature	20.3 degree celcius; 1.0 degree celcius below normal
Mean Air Temperature	17.9 degree celcius; 0.6 degree celcius below normal
Mean Daily Minimum Temperature	16.1 degree celcius; 0.4 degree celcius below normal
Mean Dew Point	13.8 degree celcius; 1.2 degree celcius below normal
Total Evaporation	69.3 mm; 22.9 mm below normal

Remarks: All measurements were made at the Royal Observatory except sunshine, solar radiation and evaporation which were recorded at King's Park.

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