



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Saturday, April 21, 1973

GOVERNMENT STEPS UP TYPHOON PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES

P.W.D. Already Checking Possible Sources Of Danger

With the approach of the 1973 typhoon season, government departments are intensifying their precautionary measures to guard against loss of life and property.

In the forefront of these preparations are staff of the Public Works Department. Guided by the principle that prevention is better than cure, many of these have been engaged, during the recent dry season, on routine inspections to check for possible sources of danger.

Engineers of the Highways Office have been particularly active, examining all main streamwaters, drains, culverts, water mains supplies and catchpits to determine their state of repair and clear any blockage.

Potentially vulnerable spots are double-checked, and contract arrangements and emergency procedures reviewed. Site inspectors and foremen are regularly briefed on their role in the event of a typhoon, severe rainstorm or any other emergency.

Similar checks are made by staff of the Civil Engineering Office, who place particular emphasis on "borrow" areas, where soil is extracted from hillsides for reclamation and other purposes.

Complementary to these efforts is the continued vigilance of surveyors and inspectors of the Buildings Ordinance Office, who keep developers informed on all precautions to be taken in the event of heavy rain.

/The Royal

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The Royal Observatory has introduced a new numbering system for the tropical cyclone signals which will be simpler than the previous system and should help to eliminate misunderstandings.

Signals that were formerly numbered 5 to 8 were now renamed 8NW, 8SW, 8NE and 8SE respectively, differentiating between directions of winds with the same force while at the same time avoiding any suggestion that wind speed, and the likelihood of danger, correspond with numerical sequence.

Information is collected by radio from all available sources, including ships, islands, land stations and aircraft over a wide area. Pictures transmitted by weather satellites, both visual and infra-red, are received daily.

Centre

When the centre of a well-developed tropical cyclone comes within about 240 nautical miles of Hong Kong it may be located by the observatory's radars mounted on top of Tate's Cairn (580 m) and tracked continuously.

The Central Forecasting Office issues warnings of violent rainstorms and thunderstorms which are also tracked by radar. A special isoecho device enables intensity of rainfall in different areas to be mapped and rainfall amounts estimated.

The Police are geared to respond to an alert immediately signal No. 3 is hoisted. Emergency equipment is checked to ensure it is readily available and in good working order. At signals above No. 3, district and divisional operations rooms are opened and all police officers return to duty.

/The 999

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The 999 system for emergency telephone calls is also equipped to handle reports of accidents and damage arising from storm conditions. The control room is manned 24 hours a day to deal with calls from all over Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories, and is linked directly to fire and ambulance services.

All 999 cars are attached to emergency units and are on continuous patrol. They are in radio contact with control and can be promptly directed to the scene of any landslide, house collapse or other incident.

There are two emergency units in Kowloon, one on Hong Kong Island and one in the New Territories, each comprising three platoons which operate on eight-hour shifts. These units form a task force for tackling any emergency that may arise in a police district.

Disaster

In a disaster, additional controllers are brought into the control rooms and a command post, with a senior officer in charge, is set up at the scene. Police cordon off the area, take initial rescue action and protect property.

Marine Police launches are available to ferry emergency medical cases from remote areas and outlying islands to urban hospital facilities. These operations can also be directed by the 999 call system.

During emergencies, all staff of Government Information Services are mobilised on a shift basis, and the news room becomes a nerve centre for passing on the latest weather information and reporting on conditions throughout the Colony.

/Team of

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Teams of information officers are allocated to vital departments to ensure a continual flow of up-to-the-minute material for the news services. Mobile teams also keep in contact with GIS to supply on-the-spot accounts of latest developments.

All government departments, together with the armed services, voluntary agencies and public utilities, such as the ferry and bus companies, liaise through GIS to keep up with events and co-ordinate rescue and relief work.

The Marine Department is heavily committed whenever the port is threatened by tropical cyclones, and its Port Communications Centre, on top of the Rumsey Street multi-storey car park, serves as the clearing house for all information concerning effects on shipping and harbour installations.

Typhoon Shelters

On the approach of a storm, all typhoon shelters are patrolled by Marine Department craft to ensure utilisation and the maintenance of fire lanes and fairways up to the last possible moment.

The harbour is patrolled by a fast launch, manned by the department's Harbour Patrol Service to offer assistance and advice, mainly to ocean-going vessels, until weather conditions force the launch to shelter. In conjunction with this service, the Port Communications Centre allocates typhoon moorings and records the movements of vessels during the storm. Information and assistance with casualties is also dealt with by the centre.

All launches are in direct contact with the signal tower, and with each other, by means of VHF radio, as are tugs and some other commercial craft, together with Fire Services, Marine Police, Port Works, Commerce and Industry, Port Health and Immigration departments.

/A contracted

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A contracted crane barge is available to relocate, remove or repair damaged navigational aids or government moorings. It can also be utilised to remove small sunken or waterlogged craft causing obstructions.

A chain of Marine Department signal stations are linked by omnibus teleprinter circuit and are manned 24 hours a day. The centre is also connected by teleprinters to the Royal Observatory and Cable & Wireless operations room.

During typhoons, rainstorms and other emergencies the Fire Services Department, who are in a constant stage of readiness at all times, may be placed on standby alert.

Alert

On this alert, all officers and firemen are re-deployed throughout operational commands, all fire appliances and vehicles undergoing routine maintenance are returned to their respective station, and additional lorries are obtained from the Public Works Department's transport pool and fitted with reserve equipment as temporary fire and rescue vehicles.

Workshop staff establish mobile repair and recovery units, liaison officers are despatched to controls, first aid posts manned by Auxiliary Medical Service personnel are established at all fire stations and Ambulance Command restricts attendance to emergency calls. Auxiliary Fire Service mobilises and in extreme cases off-duty officers and firemen would be re-called for duty.

/Other key

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Other key departments, including Medical and Health, Social Welfare, Agriculture and Fisheries and the New Territories Administration, have their own contingency resources ready to cope with emergencies, all of which are linked into the Government's overall plan for this kind of situation.

Others who play key roles in this plan include the Civil Aid Services, Royal Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force, Royal Hong Kong Regiment (The Volunteers) and voluntary organisations such as the Hong Kong Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

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Release Time: 2.30 p.m.