



## Emergency Services

Located within the sub-tropical region, Hong Kong experiences both extreme wet and dry seasons which can result in anything from floods to fire. Each year, an average of six tropical cyclones affect this 1 100 square kilometres region. Although tropical cyclones can bring torrential rain, flooding and landslides, Hong Kong has learned to protect, recover and rebuild.

A comprehensive warning system relayed through the media keeps the public informed. As the danger increases, emergency services agencies swing into action at once.

**Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre** is activated when major emergencies or natural disasters happen or are likely to happen. It monitors the response of the emergency and support services, and provides support to these services. It briefs the Chief Executive and senior officials on developments and disseminates central government policy decisions and advice.

**Home Affairs Department**, through its 18 District Offices, ensures that assistance is provided to victims of disasters. District Offices co-ordinate actions for relief arrangements, including the provision of temporary shelters, registration of victims, distribution of meals, relief articles and cash assistance. For major incidents, the District Office will co-ordinate the setting up of an inter-departmental help desk at the scene or at hospitals to provide relief and other services.

The department's network of emergency co-ordination centres ensures continuous feedback of local conditions to the Government. The department also provides a round-the-clock telephone enquiry service to the public when Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No.3 is issued, or when a Rainstorm Red Warning, Rainstorm Black Warning, or Landslip Warning is issued.

**Hong Kong Observatory** provides weather forecasts, warnings of severe weather and other meteorological and geophysical services for the public, aviation and shipping communities. Signals are issued to warn the public as tropical cyclones approach. Warnings or special announcement are also issued for rainstorms, landslips, floods in the northern New Territories, thunderstorms, strong monsoon, frost, cold and very hot weather, and fire danger. They are broadcast on radio and television, and are also available through the Internet (<http://www.weather.gov.hk>) and the department's 'Dial-a-Weather' information enquiry system (187 8200). The Observatory also monitors environmental radioactivity, storm surge, earthquake and tsunami. A tsunami warning will be issued if a tsunami is expected to affect Hong Kong.

**Hong Kong Police Force** operates a 999 emergency telephone system located in three command and control centres which are manned 24 hours a day to receive

reports of emergencies throughout Hong Kong. Patrolling police officers, police vehicles or police launches maintain a direct link with command and control centres via radio systems, which enable the immediate deployment of officers to handle reported emergencies. In some cases, police launches will be deployed to assist in ferrying injured or sick persons from outlying islands to hospitals in the urban area. Close liaison is maintained between the Police Command and Control Centres and the Fire Services Communications Centre. Requests for services of ambulance and fire officers will be referred to Fire Services Department without delay.

**Information Services Department** is the main link between the Government and the public. During typhoons, major disasters or any other emergency, ISD will activate its Combined Information Centre to disseminate the latest information on the situation and government responses to the media round the clock.

**Marine Department**, through its Vessel Traffic Centre, monitors and manages the movement of sea-going ships within Hong Kong waters on a 24-hour basis. The Director of Marine is the Search Director for search and rescue operations and other emergencies in the South China Sea north of latitude 10°N and west of longitude 120°E. Specially trained marine officers man the department's Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre 24 hours a day.

**Fire Services Department** is responsible for extinguishing fires and carrying out rescues in all fire and non-fire emergencies where life and property are in peril. It is equipped with up-to-date fire-fighting and rescue appliances. Contingency plans for dealing with disasters such as aircraft crashes, major fires, chemical incidents, landslips and floodings are at hand and are regularly reviewed. Its Communications Centre, manned round the clock, is linked to all fire stations, fireboat stations, ambulance depots, major hospitals and other emergency services.

**Government Flying Service (GFS)** provides round-the-clock search and rescue and emergency air ambulance services for those in need within Hong Kong Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue Area of Responsibility. It also assists the Fire Services Department by water-bombing hill-fires. During a typhoon, GFS helicopters will provide rescue services as required.

**Hospital Authority (HA):** HA manages 41 public hospitals and institutions, of which 15 are acute general hospitals with Accident & Emergency (A&E) Departments. Medical teams from the A&E Department of the concerned area, if required, would be deployed to the incident scene of major

disasters. They will provide essential treatment and triage patients according to severity of the injury to hospitals. An HA duty officer coordinates the overall hospital response.

**Auxiliary Medical Service (AMS)** augments the regular medical and health services. It consists of about 4 400 volunteers. All members are trained in first aid, paramedic care, disaster medicine and control of infectious diseases. In times of emergency and natural calamities, they will arrive at the scene to provide paramedic treatment to the injured and convey them to hospitals. They will also care for patients in acute or convalescent hospitals. In the unlikely event of a nuclear accident, the AMS will be charged with the responsibility of manning the monitoring centres and scanning points for decontamination process.

**Civil Aid Service (CAS)** is an auxiliary emergency relief organisation assisting the Government in tackling emergencies. The CAS provides emergency relief for the community in the event of natural or other disasters. The services embrace first aid; rescue from collapsed buildings, floods, landslides and aircraft accidents; evacuation of dangerous buildings/sites and recovery and transportation of casualties. The CAS also renders professionally trained mountain search and rescue services in Hong Kong. Other duties include crowd management in public events.

**Transport Department** is responsible for liaising with other departments and public transport operators on traffic and transport arrangements during serious traffic and transport disruptions, rainstorms and typhoons.

**Highways Department** clears and repairs public roads, removes dangerous boulders and landslips on roadside slopes along public roads (also on government land which has not been allocated to any department for maintenance), and provides support for containment and removal of oil spill pollution on beaches and foreshores.

**Architectural Services Department** is responsible for the maintenance of government buildings and facilities. In the event of threat of damage, or actual damage, arising from fire, accident or storm, the department provides advice and emergency protection and/or repair services under its maintenance responsibility, on a 24-hour basis.

During typhoons, the department's typhoon emergency service is mobilised at strategically located control centres to receive reports of damage or distress from building occupants, and to arrange temporary repairs to those buildings under the department's maintenance responsibility until the typhoon subsides. Thereafter, full repairs or remedial works are done as soon as possible.

**Buildings Department** provides an emergency service to the public on dangers relating to private buildings. The 24-hour service is linked to the police communication network. Professional officers are on duty to deal with reports and inspections are normally made within three hours.

An Emergency Control Centre is activated when Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 is issued or in times of heavy rainfall and other disasters. It co-ordinates professional services to deal with dangerous buildings, landslides, dangerous scaffolding and advertising signs.

**Civil Engineering and Development Department** decides, in liaison with Hong Kong Observatory, when a Landslip Warning should be issued and cancelled. It maintains a 24-hour service to advise government departments on immediate or potential danger due to landslides and on measures to deal with them. It deals with emergencies related to Government's transportation and storage of explosives and also emergencies related to the use of explosives and blasting in the capacity of Commissioner of Mines as the regulator.

If an aircraft crashes into the sea, the department provides divers and equipment to assist in conducting rescue or salvage operation.

**Drainage Services Department** is responsible for clearing and repairing blocked or damaged public sewers and stormwater drains, and for ensuring the satisfactory operation of sewage treatment plants, sewage and floodwater pumping stations.

An Emergency Control Centre will be activated when Red or Black Rainstorm Warning or Typhoon Signal No. 8 is issued or under other emergencies. It ensures prompt attention to flooding incidents or other emergency situations.

**Electrical and Mechanical Services Department** ensures the availability of emergency power, lift and other electrical and mechanical services to public buildings and provides equipment, recovery vehicles and floodlights for salvage and clearance operations.

**Water Supplies Department** is responsible for provision of water services. In emergencies, it isolates and repairs damaged water mains; and provides temporary water supply and fire-fighting water.

**Social Welfare Department** provides emergency relief for victims of disasters. Teams are deployed to disaster scenes to register victims and to provide emergency relief in the form of cooked meals (or cash grant in lieu of cooked meals) and essential articles as soon as possible.

The department is empowered to approve grants and to make payments in respect of grants for death and personal injuries under the Emergency Relief Fund. A cadre of clinical psychologists and social workers will be mobilised to provide emotional and other welfare support services to those in need.

**Housing Department** provides transit accommodation for the homeless and subsequent rehousing to the eligible. In an emergency, a communication centre is activated, linking duty teams to field staff to guide operations while co-ordinating with other services.

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department** obtains reports on damage or loss to fishing boats or gear, fish ponds and mariculture rafts or stocked fish, farm stock or crops, and stockhousing on farm buildings. It relays up-to-date information to the media through the Information Services Department. When Typhoon Signal No.8 is issued, its emergency tree felling teams assist in clearing blocked roads.

Immediately after a disaster, the department assesses damage and processes applications from farmers, fishermen and fish culturists for ex-gratia payment from the Emergency Relief Fund. It also fights hill fires in country parks and assists in locating people lost in hilly areas.

**St John Ambulance Brigade** has over 5 600 volunteers and 10 ambulances which are stationed at three depots in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories respectively to provide free emergency ambulance service around-the-clock. Trained volunteer members provide first-aid and allied services at the scene or public gatherings as required.

**Hong Kong Red Cross Local Disaster Relief Service** keeps a stock of 2 000 clothing bundles, 1 200 jackets and sweaters, 200 quilts and blankets, 2 000 towels and daily necessities for immediate distribution to those made homeless by disasters. In a major disaster, the organisation also appeals for public donations to assist the people affected, and is able to provide trained volunteers

to render first aid, escort and psychological support services.

**Hong Kong Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service** is managed by the Hospital Authority and provides all local

hospitals with fully tested blood and blood components derived from approximately 800 daily donations by voluntary non-remunerated donors. Round-the-clock service is available for emergency blood supply through all hospital blood banks.