

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 about six tropical cyclones affect this 1 106 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 and coordinates 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 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 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 or above is issued, or when a Red Rainstorm Warning Signal, Black Rainstorm Warning Signal, or Landslip Warning is issued by the Hong Kong Observatory.

Hong Kong Observatory provides weather forecast, severe weather warnings, as well as other meteorological and geophysical services for the public, special users, the shipping and aviation communities. Warning signals are issued to remind the public to take precautionary measures when tropical cyclones approach. Warnings or announcement are also issued for rainstorms, localised heavy rain, landslips, floods in the northern New Territories, thunderstorms, strong monsoon, frost, cold and very hot weather, and fire danger. They are delivered and broadcast through a variety of dissemination channels, including the Observatory's website (<https://www.hko.gov.hk> and <https://www.weather.gov.hk>), mobile app 'MyObservatory', the 187-8200 Dial-a-Weather hotline, press, radio, TV, Twitter, Weibo, and WeChat. Meanwhile, the Observatory will broadcast central briefing in connection with adverse weather on its YouTube channel. Updates of Tropical Cyclone Warning Signals as well as Red and Black Rainstorm Warning Signals are also disseminated via the Observatory's Facebook page. The Observatory also monitors environmental radiation levels, storm surge, earthquake and tsunami. A tsunami warning or information bulletin will be issued if a tsunami is expected to affect Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Police Force operates the Regional Command and Control Centres on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon, the New Territories and Marine Region with the 999 emergency telephone system in service to receive reports of emergencies round the clock. Once a report is received, the Command and Control Centre concerned will assign officers to attend the scene according to the case nature. For cases requiring ambulances and/or fire services, referral will be made to the Fire Services Communications Centre without delay. By using the radio system, patrolling police officers, police vehicles and police launches will maintain simultaneous communications with the Regional Command and Control Centres so as to assist the situation assessment and resources allocation. Police Headquarters Command and Control Centre will be activated during major incidents or natural disasters, and responsible for co-ordinating different police resources as well as maintaining a close liaison with other government departments, including the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre.

Information Services Department is the main link between the Government and the public. During tropical cyclones, 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 marine traffic within Hong Kong waters. Its Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre coordinates all maritime search and rescue in the international waters of the South China Sea, bounded by north of Latitude 10° North and west of Longitude 120° East. Both Centres are operating 24 hours a day, and comply with all standards and obligations of related international Conventions.

Fire Services Department is responsible for extinguishing fires and carrying out rescues in emergencies. It also provides emergency ambulance services for the sick and the injured. The Department has up-to-date fire-fighting and rescue appliances and paramedic equipment. Contingency plans for dealing with disasters such as aircraft crashes, major fires, chemical incidents, landslips and floodings, etc, are at hand and are regularly reviewed. Its Communications Centre, manned round the clock, is linked to all fire stations, fireboat stations, ambulance depots, hospitals and other emergency services.

Government Flying Service (GFS) provides a wide range of flying services, including 24-hour search and rescue coverage, support to the law enforcement agencies, emergency medical services, fire fighting and support to other government departments. It also provides emergency services to aircraft within the Hong Kong Flight Information Region and vessels within the search and rescue area of the Hong Kong Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre.

Hospital Authority (HA): HA manages 43 public hospitals and institutions, of which 18 of them provided Accident & Emergency (A&E) services. According to the HA Three-tier Emergency Command Structure, the HA Head Office Major Incident Control Centre, which coordinates the HA's overall response to the incident, Emergency Medical Team(s) will be dispatched on scene when necessary to provide essential emergency treatment to the casualties, and triage the casualties to hospital according to the casualty figures and their conditions.

Auxiliary Medical Service (AMS), consisting of 4 931 volunteers, is responsible for augmenting the regular medical and health services. All members are trained in first aid, paramedic care, disaster medicine, control of infectious diseases and inoculation. Their duties include providing paramedic treatment to the injured at the scene and conveying them to hospitals in times of emergency and natural calamities; rendering inoculation service to the public to prevent epidemics; and caring for patients in acute or convalescent hospitals. In the unlikely event of a nuclear accident, members will also be charged with the responsibility of manning the monitoring centres and scanning points and carrying out the decontamination process.

Civil Aid Service (CAS) is an auxiliary emergency relief organization consisting of over 3 700 members. It provides assistance to people of Hong Kong in the event of natural disasters and other emergencies. The CAS Mountain Search and Rescue Company is responsible for searching and rescuing people who are lost, missing or injured in the mountains of Hong Kong. In addition to emergency operations including vegetation fire-fighting, flood and landslide rescues, typhoon manning and oil pollution control at sea, the CAS also assists the Government in setting up and managing quarantine centres for the control of communicable diseases and managing crowds in large public events. In case of a radiation leak incident, the CAS will be deployed to collect and deliver air samples to the Hong Kong Observatory and help evacuate people.

Transport Department, through the Emergency Transport Coordination Centre (ETCC), is responsible for liaising with other departments and public transport operators on traffic and transport arrangements and disseminating traffic and transport information during both unplanned events such as serious traffic and transport disruptions, rainstorms and tropical cyclones as well as planned events such as public processions, commissioning of new transport infrastructures and major sports/festive events.

The ETCC operates 24 hours daily and under three different modes depending on the scale and severity of the incident. Normally, the ETCC operates under the Tier One Response (Normal ETCC Operation) on a 24-hour basis to handle minor traffic and transport incidents. The operation of ETCC will be escalated to Tier Two Response (Fixed Mode ETCC Operation) with additional staff deployed in case of small-scale planned events, serious road or tunnel incidents and serious or widespread disruption of public transport services. The operation of ETCC will be escalated to Tier Three Response (Joint Steering Mode Operation) to handle large-scale planned events or major incidents that warrant high level steer and co-ordination among departments.

Highways Department clears and repairs public roads, removes dangerous boulders and landslips on roadside slopes along public roads, and provides support for containment and removal of oil spill pollution on beaches and foreshores. The Emergency Control Centres will be activated

to coordinate the relevant emergency works whenever a Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above, a Red/Black Rainstorm Warning Signal or a Landslip Warning is issued, or under other emergencies.

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.

An Emergency Centre will be activated when Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above is in force or in times of heavy rainfall or under other emergencies. It receives reports of damage or distress from building occupants, and to arrange temporary repairs to those buildings and facilities under the department's maintenance responsibility until the storms or other disasters subside. Thereafter, full repairs or remedial works are done as soon as possible.

Buildings Department provides a 24-hour emergency service to the public on emergencies affecting the safety of private buildings. This service maintains close liaison with the police command and control centres. Professional officers are on duty to deal with reports and inspections are normally made within two hours.

An Emergency Control Centre is activated when Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is issued or in times of other disasters. It co-ordinates expeditious professional services to deal with dangerous buildings, hillsides, scaffolding and signboards.

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. In the capacity of the Government's regulator, the department also assists in dealing with emergencies related to the manufacture, transport, storage and use of commercial explosives.

If an aircraft crashes into the sea, the department will provide divers and floating equipment to assist in salvage operations.

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 and flood prevention facilities.

An Emergency Control Centre will be activated when Special Announcement on Flooding in the Northern New Territories, Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal, Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement or Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above 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, lifts and other electrical and mechanical services to public buildings and facilities under emergency situations. An Emergency Control Centre will be activated whenever a Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or higher is hoisted or a Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is issued or in times of aircraft crashes or other emergencies. It provides equipment, recovery vehicles and floodlights for salvage and clearance operations. The department is also responsible for liaising with utilities companies to ensure that, if electricity and piped gas supplies are interrupted during an emergency, these companies will carry out repair works to resume supplies as soon as practicable.

Water Supplies Department is responsible for the provision of potable, flushing and fire fighting water supplies. It has round-the-clock standby emergency teams and on-call staff to handle emergency incidents relating to water supplies. In emergencies, it isolates and repairs damaged water mains as well as provides temporary water supply to the affected customers.

Social Welfare Department provides emergency relief for victims of disasters. Teams are deployed to disaster scenes to register victims and to provide urgent food (or cash grant in lieu of food) and relief articles as soon as possible. Social workers will provide immediate emotional support and other welfare services for those in need. Clinical psychologists will also be mobilised to provide early psychological intervention should the situation warrants. Furthermore, the department is responsible for approving grants and making payments in respect of grants for death and personal injuries under the Emergency Relief Fund.

Housing Department provides transit accommodation for the homeless as a result of emergency or natural disaster and arranges eligible persons for subsequent rehousing. 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 farm buildings. It relays up-to-date information to the media through the Information Services Department. When Tropical Cyclone Warning 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 grants from the Emergency Relief Fund. It also fights hill fires in country parks and assists in locating people lost in mountains.

Hong Kong St John Ambulance Brigade has over 7 400 volunteers and 14 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. The emergency ambulance service telephone numbers is 1 878 000. Trained volunteer members provide first-aid and allied services at the scene or public gatherings as required.

Hong Kong Red Cross - Local Disaster Relief & Psychological Support 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 organization mobilizes trained psychological first aiders and psychologists to render psychological support services to the people affected immediately.

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. Regular donation by voluntary non-remunerated donors is crucial to secure the local blood supply. Round-the-clock service is available for emergency blood supply through all hospital blood banks.