

The Fire Services Department provides emergency and rescue services for the public and is responsible for firefighting and rescue on land and at sea. It also provides emergency ambulance services for the sick and the injured, and gives advice on fire protection measures and fire hazards to the public.

Organisation: The Department has 9,914 uniformed and 736 civilian members. It comprises three Operational Commands, a Licensing and Certification Command, a Fire Safety Command, an Ambulance Command, a Headquarters Command and an Administration Division. The head of the Department is the Director of Fire Services.

Fire and Special Services: Firefighting, rescue and other emergency services are undertaken by the three Operational Commands — Hong Kong (including marine and off-shore islands), Kowloon and the New Territories. In 2017, they responded to 33,934 fire calls and 36,326 special service calls.

In 2017, fires claimed 21 lives and injured 335 persons. Accidents occurred during cooking, careless handling of lighted materials (such as cigarette ends, matches and candles) and electrical faults were the major causes of fires.

Special service calls cover a wide range of incidents, including traffic and industrial accidents, gas leakages, landslides, flooding, house collapses, attempts to jump from heights and malfunctioning lifts.

The Department has 638 operational appliances and vehicles fitted with up-to-date firefighting and rescue equipment. The frontline appliances, basically comprising hydraulic platforms, major pumps, light rescue units and turntable ladders/snorkels, are supported where necessary by other special appliances/equipment. A fleet of 21 vessels provides firefighting and rescue services within Hong Kong waters.

Ambulance Services: The Ambulance Command operates 383 ambulances, four Mobile Casualty Treatment Centres, 41 Emergency Medical Assistant Motorcycles, three Rapid Response Vehicles and other supporting vehicles. All ambulance vehicles are equipped with paramedic facilities.

In 2017, the Command responded to 786,310 calls, representing an average of 2,154 calls a day, and conveyed a total of 705,681 casualties or patients to hospitals or clinics.

To enhance the emergency ambulance services, the Department provides simple Post-dispatch Advice (PDA) by phone on six easily identified emergency conditions (general bleeding, bone fractures/dislocation to limbs, burns, convulsion, heat exposure and hypothermia) after dispatching ambulances to scenes. The PDA includes simple first-aid and time-saving advice to facilitate the provision of prompt medical assistance to casualties and patients.

Frontline firemen are also trained as first responders to provide basic life support for casualties and patients before the arrival of ambulance crews. First responders are now available in all fire stations throughout the territory. In 2017, the first responders turned out for 40,298 cases.

Communications: The Fire Services Communications Centre (FSCC) is equipped with a computerised mobilising system for the efficient and effective mobilising of firefighting and ambulance resources for fires and emergencies. The

system is linked to all fire stations, ambulance depots and fireboat stations for dispatch of resources.

The FSCC has adopted a sophisticated tele-communication and computer integrated mobilising system — the Third Generation Mobilising System — to improve the efficiency of firefighting and rescue operations by enhancing the identification, location and mobilisation of resources.

The use of Digital Trunked Radio System ensures effective and efficient radio communication at incident scenes.

The FSCC, which operates round-the-clock, is also responsible for handling complaints and enquiries about fire hazards and dangerous goods. During major incidents, it acts as an emergency coordinator for government departments and public utilities. The Department has five Mobile Command Units, which serve as on-scene command and control centres in major incidents.

Licensing and Certification: The Licensing and Certification Command formulates and enforces fire safety regulations and policies, and processes the registration of fire service installations contractors.

The Policy Division formulates procedural instructions and guidelines on fire protection matters, conducts researches on relevant issues, and approves fire service installations and equipment, portable firefighting equipment and gas cylinders. It also handles legal and prosecution matters related to fire safety and protection.

The Dangerous Goods Division is responsible for the licensing of dangerous goods stores and vehicles, and timber stores.

The Fire Service Installations Task Force inspects fire service installations in buildings; handles complaints regarding building fire service installations and monitors the performance of registered fire service installations contractors.

The Fire Service Installations Division and the Ventilation Division are responsible for inspecting fire service installations and ventilating systems in buildings respectively. The latter also approves fusible links and electrostatic filters/precipitators used in ventilating systems and assists the Buildings Department in processing the registration of Specialist Contractors (Ventilation Works).

The two Regional Offices (namely the Hong Kong and Kowloon West, and the New Territories and Kowloon East) are responsible for advising other government authorities on fire safety measures for the purposes of licensing/registering various types of premises.

The Licensing Authority Division comprises officers seconded to the Office of Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department to assist in the licensing of hotels, guesthouses, clubs, karaoke establishments and bedspace apartments as well as in dealing with enforcement and prosecution matters under the jurisdiction of the OLA.

Some officers of the Command are seconded to the Social Welfare Department to advise on fire protection measures in residential care homes for the elderly and residential care homes for persons with disabilities.

Fire Safety: The Fire Safety Command draws up fire safety policies and formulates fire safety measures for buildings, and is committed to upgrading the fire safety standard of old buildings. It also vets loan applications for fire safety improvement works and raises public awareness of fire safety.

The three Building Improvement Divisions under the Command are responsible for upgrading fire safety measures for various types of buildings in Hong Kong and investigating complaints about fire safety in buildings. They also conduct proactive fire safety inspections of various types of buildings and premises.

The New Projects Division vets new and amended building plans of projects, including those of tunnels, bridges and the airport, in conjunction with the Buildings Department and other government departments. It also formulates fire protection requirements that can meet the needs of such premises and cope with relevant risks.

The Railway Development Strategy Division formulates and scrutinises fire safety requirements for new and existing railway infrastructure projects. It has been actively participating in the planning, design and improvement works of various railway projects by offering fire protection advice to the MTR Corporation and its consultants.

The Support Division formulates, reviews and updates policies on building fire safety improvement and is committed to raising public awareness of fire protection. It collaborates with various stakeholders to produce publicity and educational materials for TV/radio broadcasts as well as leaflets, posters, pamphlets, mobile applications and exhibits on fire safety. It works closely with local fire stations to organise fire safety talks, seminars, fire safety exhibitions and fire drills. Besides, the Division also endeavours to promote fire education to the elderly and ethnic minorities.

The Command has launched a number of schemes to promote fire safety, including the Building Fire Safety Envoy Scheme to encourage public participation in safeguarding the fire safety of the buildings in which they live; the Fire Safety Education in Kindergartens Programme to instil basic fire safety concepts in pre-school children; and the Fire Safety Ambassadors (FSA) Scheme to train volunteers from various sectors of the community to become FSA. To add impetus to the FSA Scheme, Fire Safety Ambassador Honorary Presidents' Associations are set up in 18 districts where local community leaders are appointed as the Honorary Presidents.

Administration and Logistical Support: The Headquarters Command provides policy, planning, management and logistical support for the Operational Commands. It also oversees the operation of the FSCC, the Information Technology Management Unit and the Fire and Ambulance Services Academy, and issues related to recruitment and examination, workshops and transport, occupational safety and health, procurement and logistics, physical training, information and publicity, staff welfare and statistics.

The Administration Division, staffed by civilians, deals with departmental establishment, personnel, finance, appointments, general matters, staff relations, audit and translation service.

Airport Fire Contingent: The primary role of the contingent is to provide rescue and firefighting coverage for the Hong Kong International Airport. The contingent, comprising two fire stations and two sea rescue berths at strategic locations on the airport platform, is equipped with 14 fire appliances, two ambulances, two command boats and eight speedboats.

Diving Services: The Department has about 150 active divers, of which 120 are stationed in the Diving Unit and 30 in the Airport Fire Contingent. The Diving Unit is responsible for all aquatic search and rescue operations within Hong Kong waters down to a maximum depth of 50 metres using compressed air diving equipment and underwater breaking-in tools. The Unit also operates a three-compartment compression chamber on Stonecutters Island for treating patients suffering from decompression illness and requiring hyperbaric oxygen treatment.

The FSD Diving Base on Stonecutters Island is equipped with a range of advanced and professional training facilities to enhance the search and rescue skills of Service divers.

Training: The Fire and Ambulance Services Academy provides foundation firefighting and rescue training for recruits as well as refresher and advanced training courses for all fire personnel. It also conducts initial and paramedic training for recruits and ambulance personnel. Besides, Advanced Ambulance Aid Training at the first responder level is offered to serving fire personnel.

The fire and ambulance recruits who have successfully completed a 26-week foundation training will be posted to fire stations and ambulance depots respectively to continue their on-the-job training in order to gain field experience.

Apart from providing training for staff of other government departments, private organisations and overseas fire officers, the Academy also runs an Enhanced Smart Teen Project for youngsters jointly with the Education Bureau.

In addition, officers also attend overseas training on the latest fire services technology, paramedic and management skills on a regular basis.

Workshops: The Workshops and Transport Division is responsible for all engineering matters related to fire appliances as well as firefighting and rescue equipment. These include design, development, procurement, inspection and maintenance, fitting out, modification, testing and commissioning.

Response Times: There are 81 fire stations, 39 ambulance depots, six fireboat stations, two sea rescue berths and a diving base strategically located to provide emergency responses for all areas within designated response times. The graded response time for building fire calls is six minutes for built-up areas and nine to 23 minutes for areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments. For emergency ambulance calls, the target response time is 12 minutes. The Department pledges to achieve the targets in 92.5% of the building fire calls in built-up areas, 94.5% of the building fire calls in areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments, and 92.5% of all emergency ambulance calls.

Public Liaison Group: The group, which comprises 30 members of the public from all walks of life, helps promote better understanding of the work of the Department among the public. It also makes suggestions for improving the delivery of the Department's public services.