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Management

Fire services improves licensing process

Inspired by the 'Be the Smart Regulator' programme, the Fire Services Department has reviewed and simplified its licensing system to facilitate business and enhance service quality - without affecting public safety.

The programme, co-organised by the Economic Analysis & Business Facilitation Unit and the Efficiency Unit, aims to improve the Government licensing system's efficiency, transparency and customer friendliness.



Business facilitator: Chief Fire Officer of the Fire Services Department's Licensing & Certification Command Lai Man Hin says the command helps improve the business environment by simplifying the licensing system.

Fire Services's Licensing & Certification Command Chief Fire Officer Lai Man Hin said the programme could improve Hong Kong's business environment and help boost the city's image in the long-term.

The command, set up in 1999, is responsible for licence operations, fire-safety regulations and policy enforcement, and provision of advisory services on fire protection measures.

Business facilitation

To reduce the time needed for issuing licences, it reviewed the process of 30 types of licensed or registered premises last year. It slashed the working days required for processing the application of Fire Safety Certificate by 17% to 33%, while working days for conducting inspection upon applicants' notification of compliance of fire safety requirements dropped by 14% to 25%.

Mr Lai said the command is developing a new computerised licensing system, which the Legislative Council's Finance Committee has approved. The system is targeted to launch in mid-2009.

To make it easier to do business, the command is conducting a trade consultation on the third-party certification scheme for fire safety.

"Efficiency can be enhanced with the participation of a third party. Related industries can provide services on the inspection and approval of fire service installation as well as the ventilation system," Mr Lai said


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The command has also implemented the case officer system since 2006 to oversee licensing operations.

Staff representatives attend bi-monthly Food & Environmental Hygiene Department briefings on fire-safety policies and regulations, and provide advisory services in the weekly meetings of the Application Vetting Panel.

Regulation improvement

Mr Lai said fire-safety regulations must be updated from time to time to meet society's emerging needs.

The command's Deputy Chief Fire Officer chairs a working group set up to review different licences' fire-services, and formulate an application guide for reference.

For example, the command has formulated flexible checking schedules upon the approval of a theme park's renovation, allowing the park to open partially for tourists.

A recent trend is to build open kitchens in restaurants. However, Mr Lai said the current fire-safety regulation requires restaurant owners to separate the kitchen from other areas with a fire-resistant wall.

After thorough fire-risk assessments, restaurants are allowed to build open kitchens by using a buffer zone and circulation area to replace the fire-resistant wall.

Customer-oriented culture

Apart from business facilitation, the programme aims to foster a customer-oriented culture among the team.

The command has co-operated with the Civil Service Bureau's Training & Development Institute to tailor-make training courses and produce promotional videos.

It held 10 workshops on customer service from last August to September, with 255 staff members participating.

A customer service enhancement team was set up last December to conduct regular surveys and review service quality.

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