

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 affects the city. 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. If the danger increases, emergency services agencies are quick to react.

Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre is activated when major emergencies or natural disasters happen or are likely to happen. It monitors and co-ordinates 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 with the assistance of District Council members as well as District Services and Community Care Teams, 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, announcement or advisory 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, X, Weibo and WeChat. Meanwhile, the Observatory broadcasts 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 is dedicated to protecting life and property, committed to delivering an effective response to

emergencies, major incidents as well as destruction and impact caused by extreme weather. The Force ensures preparedness for major incidents and extreme weather situation by conducting regular multi-agency exercises to test and improve contingency plans. On daily policing, the Force operates four Regional Command and Control Centres with the 999 emergency telephone system in service to receive reports of emergencies round the clock. The Centres will monitor all events or incidents in respective regions and keep Police Headquarters and other relevant government departments informed of any significant matters. The Police Headquarters Command and Control Centre will be activated in response to major incidents or extreme weather, 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, with a view to providing professional, co-ordinated and rapid response as well as recovery capabilities through a multi-agency approach.

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 co-ordinates all maritime search and rescue, bounded by Latitude 10° North and 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, carrying out rescue operations in emergencies, and providing emergency ambulance services for the sick and injured. The department has advanced fire-fighting, rescue and paramedic equipment. It also maintains contingency plans for dealing with disasters such as aircraft crashes, major fires, chemical incidents, landslips and flooding. The contingency plans are regularly reviewed and improved to ensure that they move with the times. The Fire Services Communications Centre, manned round-the-clock, is linked to all fire stations, fireboat stations, ambulance depots, hospitals and other emergency service units to provide efficient emergency services to the public.

Government Flying Service provides a wide range of flying services, including 24-hour search and rescue coverage, support to the law enforcement agencies, emergency medical services, fighting hill fires 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 Co-ordination Centre.

Hospital Authority (HA): HA manages 43 public hospitals and institutions, 18 of which provide Accident & Emergency services. According to the HA Three-tier Emergency

Command Structure, the HA Head Office Major Incident Control Centre co-ordinates HA's overall response to major incidents. When necessary, Emergency Medical Team(s) will be dispatched on the scene to provide emergency treatment to the casualties, and triage them to hospitals according to the casualty figures and their conditions.

Auxiliary Medical Service is an auxiliary force which supplements regular medical and health services with an establishment of over 4 900 adult volunteer members. All of them have received training on first aid, para-medicine, disaster medicine, infection control, etc. Their roles and responsibilities include handling of the sick and injured, and conveying them to hospitals in emergency incidents, multiple casualty incidents, epidemic outbreak, natural disasters, etc. On-site first aid services are provided in festive celebrations or major public events. During weekends and public holidays, they also standby and patrol along cycling tracks and in country parks to provide timely first aid and nursing care for the injured. Besides, in case of nuclear accident, volunteer members will be arranged to conduct checking and handling of radiation contamination for the public in monitoring centres.

Civil Aid Service (CAS) is an auxiliary emergency service financed by the Government, with over 3 700 members. The Service's primary duty is to augment the regular front-line emergency forces 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. The CAS also carries out emergency tasks such as vegetation fire-fighting, flood rescue, typhoon duty, landslide rescue, oil pollution control at sea, and participate in post-disaster community recovery efforts, and also conducts urban search and rescue operation to assist trapped individuals. Additionally, the CAS also assists the Government in setting up and managing quarantine centres and community isolation facilities for the control of communicable diseases and managing crowds in large public events. In case of a radiation incident, the CAS will be deployed to collect and deliver air samples to the Observatory and help evacuate people. Upholding the motto "Serving the Community with Passion, Courage and Commitment," the CAS is committed to ensure the safety of Hong Kong citizens.

Transport Department, through the Emergency Transport Co-ordination 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 (HyD) is responsible for the maintenance of public roads and has set up four Emergency Control Centres (ECCs) that will operate throughout the periods of inclement weather to centralise the receipt of information on incidents on public roads and to co-ordinate the deployment of resources for handling road emergencies. Two major ECCs - Urban and New Territories ECCs will be activated two hours before the issuance of Typhoon Signal No. 8 or when the Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is in force. They serve to conduct real-time monitoring of the latest conditions of major public roads and handle road emergencies (including taking prompt action to clear obstructions on the roads) when necessary to maintain smooth traffic flow and safeguard the safety of road users.

Architectural Services Department is responsible for the maintenance of government buildings and facilities. The department operates a 24-hour building repair hotline, offering a one-stop service for government departments to report defects and schedule repairs.

When Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above is in force or in times of heavy rainfall or under other emergencies, an Emergency Centre will be activated to assume the central co-ordination with a view to ensuring prompt emergency repairs to damaged government buildings and facilities. After the storms or other disasters have subsided, the department will carry out full repairs or remedial works as soon as possible for meeting the operational needs of government departments.

Buildings Department provides a 24-hour emergency service to the public on emergencies affecting the safety of private buildings or slopes. This service maintains close liaison with the Police Command and Control Centres. Officers are on duty to deal with reports, and inspections are normally made within two hours.

An Emergency Control Centre will be activated when Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is hoisted or when there are natural disasters posing dangers to private buildings or slopes. It provides expeditious professional services for handling emergencies, such as dangerous private buildings, slopes, scaffolding and signboards, in order to uphold public safety.

Civil Engineering and Development Department decides, in liaison with the 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, storage, conveyance 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 cleaning and repairing affected public sewerage and stormwater drainage systems as well as sewage treatment works and flood prevention facilities for ensuring their satisfactory functioning and operation.

Whenever the Observatory issues Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal, Special Announcement on Flooding in the Northern New Territories, Pre-No. 8 Special Announcement, Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above, or under other emergencies, the Drainage Services Department's Emergency Control Centre will be put into

service immediately to ensure prompt attention to flooding incidents or other emergency situations.

Electrical and Mechanical Services Department ensures the uninterrupted power supply to public buildings and facilities, as well as the effective operation of the electrical and mechanical installations under emergency situations. An Emergency Control Centre will be activated whenever a Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above is hoisted or a Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is issued or in times of aircraft crashes or other emergencies. It provides equipment like recovery vehicles, emergency generators and floodlights for salvage and clearance operations. The department is also responsible for liaising with utilities companies closely to ensure that, if electricity or 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 of waterworks operation, it adjusts the system operation mode and carries out repairs, 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 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 and making payments of grants in respect of death or personal injury 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, livestock 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 or above is issued, its emergency tree felling teams will work with other relevant government departments to assist in clearing fallen trees which 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 8 000 volunteers and 12 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 & Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Service keeps a stock of 2 000 sets of t-shirt, trouser and underwear, 1 200 outerwear, 200 blankets, 2 000 towels and daily necessities for immediate distribution to those made homeless by disasters. When necessary, mobile device charging equipment can be provided on loan basis to affected people. In a major disaster, the organisation mobilises its First aid Response Team with professional members, doctors and nurses for first aid and emergency medical need on scene or other affected area. Moreover, trained psychological first aiders and psychologists can be deployed 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.