Report of the Independent Committee in relation to the fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po (Volume 1)

The Honourable Mr Justice David LOK

The Honourable Mr CHAN Kin-por, GBM, GBS, JP

Dr Rex AUYEUNG Pak-kuen, GBS, JP

October 2026

Report of the Independent Committee in relation to the fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po (Volume 1)

(The Redacted Version)

With a view to avoiding any prejudice (actual or perceived) to the relevant criminal prosecutions, certain parts of the Index, Executive Summary and Chapters 4, 6, 10 to 15 of the main body of this Report have been redacted.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

2022 Code of Practice	FSD's Code of Practice for Inspection, Testing and Maintenance of Installations and Equipment (2022 Edition)
2026 PA	The Chief Executive's 2026 Policy Address

A

A&A	Alteration and addition
AFC	Audit fundamental check
Alarm Defects	Defects in relation to the Fire Alarm Systems
Alarm Repairs	Repairs of the Alarm Defects for all eight blocks of Wang Fuk Court
Allied Architects	Allied Architects Engineers & Associates Limited
Amoycan Fire	No 4 alarm fire at the Amoycan Industrial Centre, Ngau Tau Kok Road, Kowloon Bay in 2016
AP	Authorised Person
AS	Authorised Signatory
ASET	Available Safe Egress Time

B

BA	Building Authority
BA Log Record	Breathing Apparatus Operation Log Record
BA Set Tally	Breathing apparatus set tally
BD	Buildings Department
BD Fire Safety Code	Code of Practice for Fire Safety in Buildings 2011 (2024 Edition) issued by the BD

BD MBIS Code	Code of Practice for the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme and Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme 2012 (2023 Edition) issued by the BD
BD's MW Manual	BD's Minor Works and Signboard Control Section Manual
BD's SM Manual	BD's Site Monitoring Section Manual
BD 2023 Circular	Circular letter on "Use of Fire Retardant Protective Net/Screen/Tarpaulin/Plastic Sheeting on Façade of Buildings under Construction, Demolition, Repair or Minor Works" dated 21 March 2023 issued by the BD
BD 2026 Circular	Circular letter on "Fire Safety Precautionary Measures to be Taken During Large Scale Building Repair Works" dated 16 March 2026 issued by the BD
BD October 2025 Circular	Circular letter on "Use of Fire Retardant Protective Net/Screen/Tarpaulin/Plastic Sheeting on Façade of Buildings under Construction, Demolition, Repair or Minor Works" dated 21 October 2025 issued by the BD
Binzhou Yuanjin	Binzhou Yuanjin Chemical Fiber Rope Net Co., Ltd
Blazing Edge	Blazing Edge Limited
BMO	Building Management Ordinance (Cap. 344)
BMO Consultation Paper	Consultation paper for the proposed amendments to the BMO issued by the HAD in August 2026
BMM	Building management and maintenance
BMR	Building maintenance and renovation

BO	Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123)
BOO	Buildings Ordinance Office
BRCRS	Building Rehabilitation Company Registration Scheme
BRMA	Building Repair and Maintenance Authority
BRO	Buy or Rent Option Scheme
BSC	Building Surveying Consultant
B(A)R	Building (Administration) Regulations (Cap. 123A)
B(C)R	Building (Construction) Regulation (Cap. 123Q)
B(I&R)R	Building (Inspection and Repair) Regulation (Cap. 123P)
B(MW)R	Building (Minor Works) Regulation (Cap. 123N)
B(P)R	Building (Planning) Regulations (Cap. 123F)

C

CC	Competition Commission
CC Report	Report concerning Terms of Reference (2) of the Committee submitted by the CC to the Committee in May 2026
CC 2016 Study	The CC's report on study into aspects of the market for residential building renovation and maintenance
CE	Chief Executive
CEU	Casualty Enquiry Unit
CFD	Computational Fluid Dynamics
Chi Fu Construction	Chi Fu Construction Co.

China Status	China Status Development and Engineering Company Limited
CL	Commissioner for Labour
CMS	Computerised Mobilising System
CO	Competition Ordinance (Cap. 619)
COI	Commission of Inquiry
COIO	The Commission of Inquiry Ordinance (Cap. 86)
Committee	The Independent Committee in relation to the fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po
Committee Expert Report	Report prepared by the Committee's experts, Professor Asif Sohail Usmani and Professor Jiang Liming
Constructive	Constructive International Consultancy Limited
COP 7.13	The ICU's Control Procedures 7.13 for the Mandatory Building/Window Inspection Procedure
COP 7.14	The ICU's Control Procedures 7.14 for Minor Works
CRC	Contractors Registration Committee
CSP	Chief Superintendent of Police
CSSR	Construction Sites (Safety) Regulations (Cap. 59I)
CT	Competition Tribunal

D

DB	Director of Buildings
DBMLT	District Building Management Liaison Team
DCFO	Deputy Chief Fire Officer
DCP	Director's Command Post
DD(Ops)	Deputy Director (Operations)
DD(P&C)	Deputy Director (Public Safety and Corporate Strategy)
DEVB	Development Bureau
DFS	Director of Fire Services
DJI	Dajiang Innovations
DMC	Deeds of Mutual Covenant
DO	Divisional Officer
DVIU	Disaster Victim Identification Unit

E

EAS	Emergency Alert System
EGM	Extraordinary General Meeting
ELD	Electricity Legislation Division
EMSD	Electrical and Mechanical Services Department
Enhanced Support Service	Enhanced support service to homeowners who need to carry out large-scale BMR works under the MBIS
EOI	Expression of Interest
E-Platform	Electronic Tendering Platform
ERTs	Emergency Response Teams
EVA	Emergency vehicular access

F

FAS	Fire Alarm System
FHAN	Fire Hazard Abatement Notice
FHHRS	Fire Hydrant / Hose Reel System
First Five-Year Plan	First Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the HKSAR (2026-2030)
FIUO	Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance (Cap. 59)
FIU(SM)R	Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Safety Management) Regulation (Cap. 59AF)
FIU(SOSS)R	Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Safety Officers and Safety Supervisors) Regulations (Cap. 59Z)
Former MC	The 12th Management Committee of the Incorporated Owners of Wang Fuk Court under the chairmanship of Mr Tang Kwok Kuen
Form MBI 1	Notification of Appointment of Registered Inspector for Prescribed Inspection and / or Supervision of Prescribed Repair of Building
Form MBI 3	Certificate of Building Inspection (Applicable where Prescribed Repair is Required after Inspection)
Form MBI 3a	Certificate of Building Inspection (Applicable where NO Prescribed Repair is Required after Inspection)
Forms MBI 4	Certificate of Building Repair
Form MW01	Notice of Commencement of Class I Minor Works
Form MW02	Certificate of Completion of Class I Minor Works

Form MW03	Notice of Commencement of Class II Minor Works
Form MW04	Certificate of Completion of Class II Minor Works
FLS	Firefighter Locator System
Fred & Willie	Fred & Willie Bros Const & Eng Co Limited
FS	Fire Services
FSCC	Fire Services Communications Centre
FSD	Fire Services Department
FS 2021 Shutdown Circular	FSD Circular Letter No. 1/2021 - Shutdown of Fire Service Installations for Maintenance, Inspection, Modification or Repair
FS251	Certificate of Fire Service Installation and Equipment
FS(FHA)R	Fire Services (Fire Hazard Abatement) Regulation (Cap. 95F)
FS(I&E)R	Fire Service (Installations and Equipment) Regulations (Cap. 95B)
FS(IC)R	Fire Service (Installation Contractors) Regulations (Cap. 95A)
FSIs	Fire services installations and equipment
FSI Repairs	Plumbing Repairs, Alarm Repairs and Lighting Repairs
FSO	Fire Services Ordinance (Cap. 95)

G

Gain Profit	Gain Profit Shed Industry Limited
Government's Table of Improvement Measures	The Table of the Improvement Measures submitted by the Government to the Committee in June 2026

Greater Bay Co-operation Agreement	Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Emergency Management Co-operation and Greater Bay Area Emergency Response Operation Co-operation Framework Agreement
GSH	Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme
GSO	Gas Standards Office

H

Hang Fung	Hang Fung Building Engineering Limited
HA	Housing Authority
HAD	Home Affairs Department
HD	Housing Department
HICOM	Higher Command
HKIS	Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors
HKQAA	Hong Kong Quality Assessment Agency
HO	Housing Ordinance (Cap. 283)
HOKLAS	Hong Kong Laboratory Accreditation Scheme
Hoi Tak	Hoi Tak Construction Engineering Limited
Hop On	Hop On Management Company Limited
HOS	Home Ownership Scheme
Hubei Yubo	Hubei Yubo Energy-Saving New Materials Co., Ltd.

I

ICAC	The Independent Commission Against Corruption

ICAC Report	Report concerning Terms of Reference (2) of the Committee submitted by the ICAC to the Committee in January 2026
ICACO	Independent Commission Against Corruption Ordinance (Cap. 204)
ICU	Independent Checking Unit of the Office of the Permanent Secretary for Housing
ICUG(MBIS)	The ICU Guideline - Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme: Preliminary, Fundamental and Audit Check on Submissions (Version: December 2022)
ICUG(MW)	The ICU Guideline - Audit Arrangement for Minor Works Submission
IFITF	Inter-Departmental Fire Investigation Task Force established by the Government on 28 November 2025
IFITF Final Report	The comprehensive report prepared by the IFITF
IO	Incorporated Owners
Inquiry	The public inquiry to review and examine the causes of the fire in Wang Fuk Court, the reasons for its rapid spread and other related issues
Inquiry Solicitors	Messrs Lo & Lo, solicitors to the Inquiry
Instructed Bidders	Persons would blow the whistle to gather other contractors to help rig the outcome of the tender
IRC	Inspectors Registration Committee
ISS	ISS EastPoint Properties Limited

L

L&C Command	Licensing and Certification Command
Lam Kee	Lam Kee Construction Materials
Law Enforcement Agencies	Law enforcement agencies including the Police, the ICAC and the CC
LD	Labour Department
LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety	Code of Practice for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety issued by the Labour Department
Legal Team	Legal Team of the Committee
LIFIPS	Integrated Licensing, Fire Safety and Prosecution System
Lighting Defects	Defects in relation to the lighting in the escape staircases
Lighting Repairs	Repairs of the Lighting Defects for all eight blocks of Wang Fuk Court
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas

M

Man Sing	Man Sing General Contractors Limited
MBIS	Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme
MC	Management Committee
Mega Consultant	Mega Consultant Limited
Mega Praise	Mega Praise Construction & Engineering Limited
MIMS	Mandatory Inspection Management System
MMT	Market Misconduct Tribunal
Motive Design	Motive Design Limited

MOU	Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Director of Housing and the Director of Buildings
MW Team	Minor Works Team of the ICU
MWCRC	Minor Works Contractors Registration Committee
MWCS	Minor Works Control System
MWIS	Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme
MWMS	Minor Works Management System
MW	Minor Works

N

NCC	Non-Collusion Clauses
NCTC	Non-Collusive Tendering Certificates
New MC	The 12th Management Committee of the Incorporated Owners of Wang Fuk Court under the chairmanship of Mr Tony Tsui
New Nam Fong	New Nam Fong Construction Limited
New Operator	The operator of the Enhanced Support Service
nine Residents	The nine residents, who were Involved Parties of the Evidential Hearing

O

OBB 2.0 Scheme	Operation Building Bright 2.0 Scheme
OCTB	Organized Crime and Triad Bureau
Ombudsman	Office of The Ombudsman
OS-O	Occupational Safety - Operations
OSH	Occupational safety and health

OSHO	Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509)
OSO	Occupational Safety Officer

P

PAR	Pre-tender Assessment Report
PBP	Prescribed Building Professional
PC&E	Prestige Construction & Engineering Co., Limited
PCCC	Police Control and Command Centre
PCO	Police Communications Officer
Plumbing Defects	Defects in relation to plumbing of the FHHRSs of some blocks
Plumbing Repairs	Repairs of the Plumbing Defects for all eight blocks of Wang Fuk Court
PMC	Property management company
PMP	Professional management practitioner
PMSA	Property Management Services Authority
PMSAO	Property Management Services Ordinance (Cap. 626)
PNAP	Practice Note for Authorized Persons, Registered Structural Engineers and Registered Geotechnical Engineers
PNBI	Practice Note for Mandatory Building and Window Inspection Schemes
PNRC	Practice Note for Registered Contractors
POBO	Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (Cap. 201)
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment

Previous Similar Fire Incidents	Building façade and construction site fires in recent years
PSAC	Pre-commencement site audit check
PSH	Permanent Secretary for Housing
PStnO	Probationary Station Officer
PTU	Police Tactical Unit

Q

QP	Qualified Person

R

RA	Registered Architect
RC	Registered Contractor
RCCC	Regional Command and Control Centre
RCCC NT	RCCC New Territories
Red Sun	Red Sun Construct (Asia) Engineering Limited
Report	The Report after the completion of the Inquiry by the Committee
Residents' Recommendations	Proposed Improvements submitted by the nine Wang Fuk Court residents on 15 June 2026
RFSIC	Registered Fire Service Installation Contractor
RFSIT	Registered Fire Service Installation Technician
RI	Registered Inspector
Rich Surplus	Rich Surplus Develop Limited
RGBC	Registered General Building Contractor
RGE	Registered Geotechnical Engineer
RMWC	Registered Minor Works Contractor
RPE	Registered Professional Engineer

RPS	Registered Professional Surveyor
RSC	Registered Specialist Contractor
RSE	Registered Structural Engineer
RSET	Required Safe Egress Time
RS Surveyors	RS Surveyors Limited

S

SAC	Site audit check
SAR	Search and Rescue
SCBA	Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus
SCOUT	alphaSCOUT
SDN	Shutdown Notice
SFO	Securities and Futures Ordinance (Cap. 571)
Shandong Chenxu	Shandong Chenxu New Materials Co., Ltd.
Shanghai Xinpuda	Shanghai Xinpuda Energy Technology Co., Ltd.
Shing Construction	Shing Construction Co., Limited
SHYA	Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs
Smart Goal	Smart Goal Construction Engineering Limited
Smart Tender Scheme	Smart Tender Building Rehabilitation Facilitating Services Scheme operated by the URA
SM Team	Site Monitoring Team of the Independent Checking Unit
SMS	Site Monitoring Section of the Buildings Department
SN	Statutory Notice
SP	Supervision plan

SPCO	Senior Police Communications Officer
SStnO	Senior Station Officer
StnO	Station Officer

T

TAR	Tender Analysis Report
TCP	Technically Competent Person
TD	Technical Director
TG on MW	Technical Guidelines on MWCS (2024 Edition) and the subsequent amendments in 2025
Tin Hung	Tin Hung Engineering Co.
TOR	Terms of Reference
TOR1	Clause 1 of the Terms of Reference
TOR2	Clause 2 of the Terms of Reference
TPS	Tenants Purchase Scheme

U

UAST	Unmanned Aircraft System Team
URA	Urban Renewal Authority
URAO	Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance (Cap. 563)

V

Victory Fire	Victory Fire Engineering Limited
VIM	VIM Architects Limited

W

Wealth Pinnacle	Wealth Pinnacle Limited
WF Court	Wang Fuk Court
Widely	Widely Construction & Engineering Limited
Will Power	Will Power Architects Company Limited
Works Contract	The Contract for the Prescribed Repair Works at Wang Fuk Court
Works at WF Court	BMR works at Wang Fuk Court
WSD	Water Supplies Department
Wuhan Hansu	Wuhan Hansu New Materials Co., Ltd.

Executive Summary

1. In the afternoon of 26 November 2025, a fire broke out at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po ("WF Court"). At the time, large-scale building maintenance and renovation ("BMR") works were being carried out in all eight buildings of the residential estate ("Works") under the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme ("MBIS") at a contract sum of HK$336 million. All buildings were covered by bamboo scaffoldings and protective nets.

2. The fire first started on the flat roof in between Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) between 14:30 and 14:40 hours. It spread to another six buildings in WF Court rapidly.

3. The fire alarm was upgraded to No 5 alarm about three and a half hours after the start of the fire. The firefighting operation lasted for about 43 hours in total.

4. The fire eventually claimed 168 lives including one firefighter carrying out rescue operations. 79 individuals were injured.

5. On 12 December 2025, the Chief Executive announced the appointment of The Honourable Mr Justice Lok, a judge of the Court of First Instance of the High Court, as the Chairman of the Independent Committee in relation to the fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po ("the Committee") to conduct a public inquiry to review and examine the causes of the fire, the reasons for its rapid spread and other related issues ("the Inquiry"). Members include The Honourable Mr Chan Kin Por, GBM, GBS, JP and Dr Rex Auyeung Pak Kuen, GBS, JP.

6. Following the formal commencement of its work on 19 December 2025, the Committee visited the site at WF Court to better understand the situation on the ground. The Committee issued two rounds of invitations to invite members of the public and organisations to provide information. In addition, the Committee held a total of 30 days of Evidential Hearing to hear oral evidence from 80 factual and expert witnesses, and submissions from the legal representatives of the involved parties. The Committee also ascertained the relevant facts through written statements submitted by different individuals and organisations, and evidence submitted in other forms. In the end, over one million files were received and reviewed by the Committee.

7. This report sets out the findings and the recommendations of the Committee after the completion of the Inquiry ("Report"). It is divided into 16 chapters.

8. **Chapter 1** is the Introduction and Acknowledgement.

9. In **Chapter 2**, the Committee explains its approach in dealing with the various issues under its Terms of Reference ("TOR") and analysing the facts, the reasons that it does not see a need to trigger the conversion to a statutory Commission of Inquiry, and the principles that the Committee follows in conducting this Inquiry.

10. **Chapter 3** provides background information about WF Court, showing its geographical location and sample floor plans to help readers better understand the subsequent chapters.

11. **Chapter 4** provides information about the Works at WF Court, setting out what parties are relevant and their respective roles in relation to the Works, the tender process, and the state of the Works prior to

the fire, including the condition of materials on the scaffolding, the creation of access openings in the escape staircases, and the operational status of the fire services installations and equipment ("FSIs").

12. In **Chapter 5**, the Committee has reconstructed what happened during the day of the fire, including how the fire was detected, its rapid vertical spread through the re-entrants of a building and across buildings, the internal conditions within each of the seven buildings affected by the fire, and the attempts to activate the Fire Alarm Systems ("FASs") which had been switched off in all buildings. This chapter also carries details about the fatalities and injured persons, such as where they were found, and degree of property damaged by the fire by building.

13. In **Chapter 6**, the Committee sets out the outcome of its review about the causes of fire, the reasons for the spread of the fire, and the causes of heavy casualties. The Committee was assisted by the experts of the Committee, the Government's Inter-departmental Fire Investigation Task Force and Government Laboratory in reaching its findings. The evidence shows that the fire was most likely caused by a glowing source, likely a cigarette, which ignited paper materials on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and caused them to smoulder. The Committee has identified the following human fault, error, or oversight which had led to the fire and the high casualties: (i) the behaviour of workers at BMR works site such as smoking and leaving garbage accumulated on, for example, the flat roofs of the buildings and scaffolding work platforms; (ii) the use of unsafe building materials such as non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets and canvases, foam boards, and to a lesser extent wooden planks and toe boards; (iii) the adoption of unsafe building procedures such as the creation of access openings in escape staircases; and (iv) the improper operation of the FSIs by unqualified persons.

14. In **Chapter 7**, the Committee has reviewed, again with the assistance of experts, the firefighting, rescuing and evacuation efforts made by various departments, and the procedures in handling the emergency calls and requests for assistance. The Committee heard many examples of firefighters putting their personal safety at risk in order to save lives and commends them for their heroism in such perilous circumstances. The Committee takes the view that the Fire Services Department ("FSD") and the Hong Kong Police Force ("Police") had on the whole done the best they could, under the operating mechanism at the material time, to cope with the fire of an unprecedented scale. The Committee takes note of the extreme and most difficult conditions facing the Incident Commanders at the scene, and does not make any criticism against the real-time and tactical decisions made by them. This notwithstanding, the Committee has pointed out areas of improvement and lessons to be learnt, such as areas for improvement in operational decisions and systemic arrangements. The Committee has also identified instances in which the handling of emergency calls for assistance, communications between the two departments, and those between the Fire Services Command Centre and firemen at site could be improved.

15. In **Chapter 8**, the Committee has reviewed the circumstances leading to and the cause of the death of Senior Fireman (Posthumous) Mr Ho Wai Ho ("Fireman Ho"), and the operation procedures and equipment relating to his death. The Committee finds that Fireman Ho had demonstrated exceptional bravery and a deep sense of duty while responding to the incident. His death was in the most unfortunate circumstances. The Committee is satisfied that Fireman Ho had been provided with the appropriate personal protective equipment and breathing apparatus. This notwithstanding, the Committee is of the view that the FSD should continue to explore if there can be any improvements in the relevant equipment, and should further review the operational procedures of firemen entering a fire scene.

16. In **Chapter 9**, the Committee sets out the regulatory regimes under the different Government departments which are relevant to fire safety of BMR works. They include the FSD, the Buildings Department ("BD"), the Independent Checking Unit of the Office of the Permanent Secretary for Housing ("ICU"), and the Labour Department ("LD").

17. In **Chapter 10**, the Committee has analysed the responsibility and accountability of the various contractors and other private parties whose involvement was material to the Works. These parties include, most significantly, Prestige Construction & Engineering Co. Ltd ("PC&E") (the main contractor for the Works), Will Power Architects Co. Ltd ("Will Power") (the consultant for the Works) and Mr Ng Yeuk Wilson, the Registered Inspector ("RI") engaged by Will Power as required under the MBIS, which/who were in charge of the project. There are also other private parties whose scope of work was more specific. The Committee has made findings that PC&E and the persons responsible for its management (namely Mr Hau Wa Kin and Mr Ho Kin Yip Gordon); Will Power and the person responsible for its management (namely Mr Wong Hap Yin Jason); and Mr Ng Yeuk Wilson are the main culprits responsible for the occurrence of the inferno and the high fatalities. They deserve the most severe criticisms from the Committee.

18. PC&E and Will Power were fully aware of the fire risks. [redacted] They ignored all complaints and safety concerns raised repeatedly by the residents of WF Court in executing the Works. Their conduct was not just mere oversights or negligence. They used sub-standard building materials and adopted unsafe building works procedures, most notably use of non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets, use of inflammable foam boards to cover windows of all eight buildings for a prolonged period, and creation of access openings in escape staircases. [redacted]

[redacted] They were responsible for the non-operation of the FSIs (including the FASs and the Fire Hydrant/Hose Reel systems) on the day of the fire. With a view to getting round the regulatory regimes, they arranged a dummy RI (i.e. Mr Ng Yeuk Wilson) and a dummy Registered Fire Service Installation Contractor ("RFSIC") (i.e. China Status Development and Engineering Co. Ltd ("China Status")) to file documents and notices as required by the different regulators to feign compliance on paper. By so doing, they put the lives of all residents in WF Court at serious risk, apparently with a view to maximising their financial gains.

19. The Committee has also found that there are other private parties culpable to the disaster in varying degrees. These include: (i) Gain Profit Shed Industry Ltd, which knew about and was a party to the acts of replacing non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets with fire-retardant ones for site inspection with a view to deceiving the regulators, and the use of non-fire-retardant nets puts the lives of residents at risk; (ii) China Status, which was the RFSIC engaged by PC&E as a dummy to repeatedly submit shutdown notices to the FSD to fulfil compliance on paper; (iii) ISS EastPoint Properties Ltd ("ISS"), WF Court's property management company, which had, amongst other things, allowed its staff (who was not an RFSIC) to turn off the power supply to the FASs in all eight buildings. Because of the shutdown of FASs, there was no fire alarm on the day of the tragic event to alert the residents of the fire; and (iv) Victory Fire Engineering Ltd, the RFSIC engaged by ISS for WF Court's FSI annual inspection and related works, which should perhaps be criticised for its passivity in dealing with fire safety issues which are matters of serious concern.

20. In **Chapter 11**, the Committee has analysed the responsibility and accountability of various Government departments and public body involved in oversight of the fire risks associated with the Works. They include the FSD, the BD, the ICU, the LD, the Police, the Home

Affairs Department ("HAD"), and the Urban Renewal Authority ("URA"). The Committee has received evidence of a large volume of complaints by WF Court residents to various Government departments. The Committee has serious questions as to whether hazards that ordinary citizens recognised as fire risks were adequately investigated and followed up by the bodies charged with oversight. The Committee finds that no Government department took effective ownership of various fire safety issues, and complaints about fire hazards fell into a vacuum.

21. The Committee takes the view that the BD and the ICU, as the two entities primarily responsible for supervising the execution of the Works, had failed in their supervisory duties in ensuring the safety of such works. Between the two departments, the ICU should bear a greater share of responsibility as its failings cover both policy and operational levels. The Committee has also identified instances showing the presence of lax enforcement attitude in the ICU. The failings of the BD and the ICU can be summarised as a combination of the following deficiencies: lack of sense of crisis, regulatory lapses, systemic blind spots, and enforcement failures.

22. Though the members of the FSD had demonstrated great heroism in carrying out the firefighting and rescue operations on the day of the fire, the FSD had failed its supervisory duty in the following areas: (i) in properly assessing the fire risks and hazards associated with the Works and removing them; and (ii) in supervising the shutdown of the FSIs in the eight buildings in WF Court and the proper discharge of duty by the RFSICs. In the opinion of the Committee, there was a lack of a sense of crisis about the potential fire risk of large-scale BMR works, which is regrettable in view of what happened in similar fire incidents both locally and in other parts of the world.

23. As compared with the BD, the ICU and the FSD, the Committee is of the view that the LD should bear lesser responsibility for the fire and the resulting high casualties. The Committee accepts that the LD is mainly responsible for occupational safety and health of workers (as opposed to occupants in general) in BMR sites and might not have the expertise to deal with technical issues relating to different building materials and building procedures. Nevertheless, the Committee questions whether the LD was right in declining jurisdiction to deal with certain risks posed by temporary building materials that also endanger workers. The Committee also finds that the way in which the LD handled the complaints concerning serious safety concerns (such as smoking on site, and about fire retardancy of scaffolding nets and foam boards) unsatisfactory.

24. The Committee has not made any findings against the Police, the HAD and the URA insofar as oversight of the fire risk is concerned.

25. Having examined the responsibility of the respective parties involved, the Committee concludes that the fire at WF Court was the result of the faults and deliberate misconduct of various individuals from the private sector and decades of failure by the bodies in positions of responsibility in the construction, fire safety engineering and building management industries, and the Government to appreciate and address the danger and the likely risk of a devastating fire when occupied buildings are undergoing major BMR works. Further, disaster of such magnitude involved not just violations of safety rules but also long-standing flaws in the regulatory regimes and slack enforcement attitude.

26. The Committee agrees with the observation that the fire was the product of sustained, multi-faceted [redacted] by multiple private actors operating over a period of months, [redacted]

[redacted] It is evident to the Committee that [redacted] specifically sought to circumvent or undermine the existing structural frameworks in place, thereby seriously hampering and undermining the Government's supervisory function.

27. Yet, had the various Government departments involved had a sense of crisis about the risks and possible consequences of building façade fires, plugged the loopholes in the regulatory regimes, properly prioritised their work having regard to the high and obvious risks associated with BMR works, paid sufficient heed to the real possibilities of the professionals not properly discharging their duties, adopted a more "people-centred" and "take an extra step to help" mindset, there was a real possibility that the misconduct of the private-sector parties and the fire hazards in WF Court could have been rectified or removed before the fire. Indeed, lax enforcement by responsible regulatory authorities inevitably leads to lax and poor performance by corresponding private-sector parties. The Committee therefore finds that whilst unscrupulous contractors, consultants and professionals from the aforementioned private sectors are the main culprits of the tragedy at WF Court, the four Government departments named above should also bear part of the responsibility.

28. The Committee wants to stress one point. The failings and the working attitude of individual departments identified in the Report are observed by the Committee based on the evidence in the Inquiry. Such failings should not apply across the board to other Government bureaux and departments and civil servants.

29. In **Chapter 12**, the Committee sets out its recommendations about TOR matters concerning the fire and its rapid spread. This chapter is divided into those requiring immediate implementation versus those representing longer-term structural reforms for the Government's consideration. Recommendations range from immediate ban on the use of

certain dangerous building materials and practices, smoking ban, reform of the MBIS, enhancement of the regulation of professionals, closer monitoring of MBIS projects by all departments involved under the umbrella of an inter-departmental task force, to enhanced complaint handling mechanism. The recommendations in this chapter, together with those concerning bid-rigging and related issues as set out in Chapter 15, are summarised in **Annex 1**.

30. In **Chapter 13**, the Committee has examined whether there were systemic problems, such as undue connected interests, conflicts of roles, or improper collusion across all stages of large-scale BMR works in Hong Kong, and whether bid-rigging, corruption, or irregularities featured in the tendering process of these works. The Committee has reviewed the regulatory framework relating to bid-rigging and other anti-competitive behaviour. It has also examined the efforts of various bodies, notably the Competition Commission ("CC"), the Independent Commission Against Corruption ("ICAC"), the Police, the HAD and the URA, in tackling the untoward behaviour.

31. Based on information supplied by the Law Enforcement Agencies including the CC, the ICAC and the Police in their reports and other submissions from members of the public, the Committee agrees with the observations made by the various Law Enforcement Agencies about the presence of various unlawful and dubious practices in the large-scale BMR works sector, and that these practices are indeed widespread, systematic and long-standing. The Committee also finds that such bid-rigging and associated misconduct may involve different parties spanning from building contractors, building consultants, personnel of property management companies, middlemen, members of Management Committees of buildings, to even homeowners themselves. Some of them have triad affiliations. The Committee is of the view that such a corrupt eco-system is intolerable, and urges the Government and the public should make use of this

opportunity to rebuild a healthy environment for the large-scale BMR works industry.

32. In **Chapter 14**, the Committee has made reference to the case of WF Court to illustrate the kind of systemic vulnerabilities that may exist across the large-scale BMR market. Through reviewing the tendering process of the Works and the management of building affairs, the use of proxy votes and the role of the URA in the operation of the Smart Tender Scheme in the specific case of WF Court, the Committee has concluded that many features indicating the presence of bid-rigging and other associated misconduct were indeed present in WF Court.

33. In **Chapter 15**, the Committee has set out its recommendations to combat bid-rigging and other untoward behaviour commonly found in the tendering and management of BMR works, clean up the BMR industry, and enhance the support to homeowners in undertaking BMR projects which scale and complexity may simply overwhelm laymen. The Committee has also set out its observations about the proposal to set up a centralised institution to help homeowners to arrange the tendering of and manage MBIS projects. Noting that it will take time to change the infamous culture and malpractices in the BMR industry and persistent vigilance would be required to tackle these problems, the Committee has proposed to establish a Steering Committee, led by an officer at the level of Secretaries or Deputy Secretaries of Departments, to monitor the effectiveness of the reform introduced after the WF Court fire and the various aspects of the implementation of the MBIS regime on a continuous basis, and to come up with new reform if the need so arises.

34. **Chapter 16** is the Committee's Concluding Remarks.

35. This Report will be part of the official records about one of the most devastating fires in the history of Hong Kong which upended the lives of 1,984 households and their families in a single afternoon. The pain is acutely felt by the victims and the whole Hong Kong community. The Committee hopes that this Inquiry will provide a solid foundation for accountability, reform and legal consequences that follow. The Committee also hopes that this Report can transform the mindsets of various stakeholders and mark the start of a new chapter – one dedicated to building up a clean and healthy BMR industry, nurturing professionals to discharge their duties with the highest ethical and professional standards, and promoting a more "people-centred" and safety-conscious mindset amongst the civil servants in Hong Kong.

THE REPORT

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

1. In the afternoon of 26 November 2025, a fire broke out at Wang Fuk Court ("WF Court") in Tai Po. By that time, there were large-scale building maintenance and renovation ("BMR") works carried out at WF Court with all the eight buildings covered by bamboo scaffoldings and protective nets. The fire first started on the flat roof in between Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F), and the fire spread rapidly to another six buildings in WF Court.

2. The fire alarm was upgraded to No 5[1] alarm about three and a half hours after the start of the fire.

3. Though the blaze in some of the buildings was under control in the early morning of 27 November, there was still ferocious burning in other parts of WF Court for a considerable period of time. The firefighting operation lasted for about 43 hours in the end.

4. There were many occupants trapped inside the buildings waiting to be rescued. There were also other residents of WF Court witnessing the unrelenting blazes burning in their homes. Some of them were waiting anxiously and crying for help desperately as their loved ones were trapped inside the burning buildings. The general public was also able to see the horrific scenes at the burning site from electronic and social media. To many, a tragedy of such scale and dimension was unimaginable.

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1 No 5 alarm is already the highest level of fire unless it is a widespread incident, or a series of simultaneous incidents, likely to engage the entire resources of the Fire Services Department for a protracted period, potentially requiring the assistance of the garrison stationed in Hong Kong. In such scenario, a Disaster Alarm would be activated.

5. The fire eventually claimed 168 lives including one firefighter carrying out rescue operations. 79 individuals, including 13 Fire Services Department ("FSD") members and one news reporter, were injured in the incident.

6. There were three days of official mourning in Hong Kong from 29 November to 1 December 2025.

7. The Chief Executive ("CE") announced on 2 December 2025 that an Independent Committee would be set up to conduct a public inquiry to review and examine the causes of the fire, the reasons for its rapid spread and other related issues ("Inquiry"). The Committee would be chaired by a judge.

8. On 12 December 2025, the CE made an announcement appointing The Honourable Mr Justice Lok, a judge of the Court of First Instance of the High Court, as the Chairman of the Independent Committee in relation to the fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po ("Committee"). Members include The Honourable Mr Chan Kin Por, GBM, GBS, JP and Dr Rex Auyeung Pak Kuen, GBS, JP.

9. The Government has established a Secretariat to support the work of the Committee, headed by a Directorate-grade Administrative Officer, Miss Carrie Chang.

10. Shortly after its appointment, the Committee appointed Messrs Lo & Lo as solicitors to the Inquiry ("Inquiry Solicitors"). The Committee also appointed Mr Victor Dawes SC ("Mr Dawes SC") as the leading counsel to the Inquiry.

11. This is the Report after the completion of the Inquiry by the Committee ("Report").

12. In showing the Committee's gratitude for the assistance it has received in its work, the Committee wishes first to acknowledge the victims who had lost their homes and loved ones during the fire. They are the ones who suffered the most during this tragic event. Apart from the extension of the deepest condolences, the Committee must also express its greatest gratitude to all the victims of the fire for their understanding and patience in waiting for the result of the Inquiry. Further, the Committee is grateful to all those surviving residents who had to recall their painful memories in giving testimony in the Evidential Hearing. Without their accounts, the Committee could not have reached a thorough understanding about what actually happened at WF Court both before and during the fire.

13. Though the FSD is a subject for investigation in the Inquiry, one should not question the heroism that the firefighters had demonstrated in fighting the fire and rescuing the residents in WF Court, with one of them, Senior Fireman (Posthumous) Mr Ho Wai Ho ("Fireman Ho"), losing his life in the line of duty. As recalled by some of the firefighters, WF Court became a battlefield shortly after the start of fire, with bamboo poles and burning pieces of protective nets falling on them when they were faced with numerous calls for assistance and rescue. The Committee heard many heroic stories about the firefighters who had risked their lives in carrying out the rescue operations. Their professionalism and unreserved dedication to duty deserve the greatest respect and gratitude from all in the community. As rightly observed by one of the surviving residents of WF Court, Madam Sin Sin Hing (witness no 6), they are truly the pride of Hong Kong.

14. When the CE appointed the Committee, he indicated that all the bureaux and departments of the Government would provide full cooperation and assistance to the Committee. Though some of the Government departments and public bodies are subject to serious criticisms in this Report, the Committee must acknowledge the unreserved cooperation and assistance provided by the Government in facilitating the conduct of this Inquiry. The Committee and its legal team ("Legal Team") had made numerous requests to various Government departments and public bodies to supply witness statements and relevant documents and materials, and all these requests were complied with without any undue delay. For example, the FSD had provided a total of 33 witness statements to the Committee, resulting in the attendance of 14 officers including Mr Yeung Yan Kin Andy (witness no 62), the Director of Fire Services ("DFS") in giving oral testimony in the Inquiry. Without this evidence, the Committee would not have been able to understand the root causes of all the problems in the existing systems.

15. Further, the law enforcement agencies, in particular the Hong Kong Police Force ("Police"), have provided the Committee with some of the most valuable witness statements and important materials obtained by them in the criminal investigations relating to the large-scale BMR works at WF Court ("Works at WF Court"). The Police, the Independent Commission Against Corruption ("ICAC") and the Competition Commission ("CC") have also provided the Committee with their reports on their findings and observations about the usual improper conduct associated with the tendering of large-scale BMR contracts in Hong Kong, which were obtained by them through a sustained period of painstaking investigations. Without their full cooperation and assistance, it would have taken years for the Committee to complete the Inquiry.

16. The Committee also received substantial expert evidence on the cause and spread of fire:

(i) A comprehensive report ("IFITF Final Report") was prepared by the Inter-Departmental Fire Investigation Task Force ("IFITF") established by the Government on 28 November 2025.

(ii) The IFITF comprises representatives from the FSD, the Police, the Buildings Department ("BD"), the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department ("EMSD"), the Independent Checking Unit of the Office of the Permanent Secretary for Housing ("ICU"), the Labour Department ("LD") and the Government Laboratory. They were assisted on scientific matters by: (a) Ir Professor Yuen Kwok Kit Richard ("Professor Yuen") (witness no 76), who prepared a report based on bench-scale tests, a full-scale fire test at the Sichuan University of Science and Engineering and computational fluid dynamics ("CFD") simulations ("Professor Yuen Final Expert Report"); and (b) Dr Lee Wing Man ("Dr Lee") (witness no 75), Senior Chemist, Forensic Science Division of the Government Laboratory, who carried out various laboratory testing of the materials found in the fire scene.

(iii) The Committee's experts, Professor Asif Sohail Usmani ("Professor Usmani") (witness no 79) and Professor Jiang Liming ("Professor Jiang") (witness no 80), also conducted a separate analysis based on photographic and videographic evidence of the fire, combustion tests and CFD simulations and prepared a separate report ("Committee Expert Report").

17. The Committee would like to express the heartfelt gratitude to all these experts and the members of the IFITF whose reports and evidence provide a solid foundation for the Committee to make findings regarding the causes of the fire and its rapid spread.

18. The Committee wishes to convey its heartfelt appreciation to the Government departments and other organisations listed at **Annex 2** for their exemplary support, which was essential to the smooth conduct of the Evidential Hearing.

19. Last but not the least, the Committee would also wish to express its greatest gratitude to all the hardworking members of the Legal Team and the Secretariat. Messrs Lo & Lo had assisted in a number of important inquiries in the past, and their experience was most helpful in setting the Inquiry in motion, in particular, in the early stage, as the time constraint has always been a critical consideration in the conduct of the present Inquiry. Under the leadership of Mr Dawes SC, the Legal Team had been working around the clock and meticulously on the matters that needed to be investigated in the Inquiry. The members of the Secretariat also made substantial contributions for the smooth operation of the Inquiry. Without the efforts of these dedicated people, the Committee would not have been able to complete the Inquiry so expeditiously and smoothly, exploring all the necessary issues that needed to be covered by this investigation.

20. The Committee is conscious that the Inquiry's work and hearings have been followed closely by the media and the public at large. This is understandable given the number of fatalities and the dimension and scale of the inferno. Some of the media agencies have carried out their own investigations into the tragic event, and their reports provided materials for the Committee to pursue certain investigations. Some of the findings made in this Report are in fact in line with the media reports, whilst some

other findings are made after carrying out comprehensive investigations in this Inquiry.

21. Insofar as remedial measures are concerned, some of the Government's bureaux and departments had implemented a number of measures in response to the inferno at WF Court,[2] for example, introducing legislation banning smoking in construction sites and intensifying the regulation of fire services installations and equipment ("FSIs") and registered fire service installation contractors ("RFSICs"), increasing the frequency of inspections of FSIs in buildings and requiring prior testing of the fire-retardant property of scaffolding protective nets prior to their erection at construction sites. Some of these measures overlap with the recommendations made in this Report. The speedy introduction of these measures, though some may regard it as late, should still be commended as an indication of good governance. Past experience tells us that the Government would usually wait for the report of a public inquiry before making any reforms or implementing any remedial measures. There is a general concern that the speedy introduction of such remedial measures indicates fault or oversight on the part of the Government, as the public would query why the Government had not adopted such measures before the subject incident. Whatever adverse comments the Committee may have made against the Government in this Report, the Committee welcomes such speedy action by the Government.

22. Despite the limited time allowed for the Committee to complete the Inquiry, the Committee believes that the proceedings have been open and transparent and have shown the thoroughness of the Inquiry's investigations, in which every aspect under the Terms of Reference ("TOR")

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2 The legal team of the Government has submitted a Table of the Improvement Measures to the Committee in June 2026 ("Government's Table of Improvement Measures"), providing a full list of the remedial measures taken by the Government after the fire (https://www.ic-wangfukcourtfire.gov.hk/pdf/docs/The-Government-Submission-on-Improvement-Measures.pdf).

has been fully explored. A tragedy of such dimension, which claimed so many lives, deserves no less.

23. This tragic fire has prompted us to reflect deeply. But as observed by Madam Lo Hiu Kei (witness no 15), one of the former residents of WF Court who lost her mother in the fire, the price to pay for these lessons is simply too high. The inferno was just like a perfect storm, exposing a series of deficiencies in every sector responsible for the execution and supervision of the Works at WF Court. The objective of this Inquiry is to identify the root causes of the fire and the deficiencies in the systems that contributed to the tragic incident. The Committee has also made various recommendations in this Report with a view to preventing similar incidents from happening in the future. Since these recommendations would affect numerous stakeholders in the community, further debates in the public forum will be necessary. In any event, the work should not end with this Report. With such painful memories of the inferno, the search for solutions to prevent such incidents should be an ongoing process. The Committee hopes that this Inquiry can raise the awareness of the Government and the whole community about the fire risks associated with the execution of BMR works. Fire prevention should never be the sole responsibility of the Government. As demonstrated by many incidents in the past, small matters such as leaving a smoke door open, whether deliberately or by oversight, can lead to disastrous results. The building professionals, the fire safety engineering professionals, the building management professionals, the regulatory authorities and the members of the general public would all have to do their jobs in order to make the buildings safe during the execution of any BMR works. The Committee hopes that this Inquiry can help to build a safer and better Hong Kong, a place we call home.

24. There were many heart-touching moments in this Inquiry: the expression of gratitude from the surviving residents to the firefighters and their neighbours for saving their lives; the offering of an apology by the family members of a deceased couple to Fireman Ho after they learnt that he died in the course of answering the call to rescue their parents; the making of an emotional plea by a security guard (who had been working in WF Court for about 20 years) that, contrary to the allegations made on social media, she was not the first person fleeing the site and she had stayed on in the burning building finding ways to save the residents before finally being ordered to evacuate the site; the encouragement given by some of the survivors to their fellow residents that they should stay positive and strive for a better future. Indeed, the Inquiry provided an opportunity to many residents and persons associated with WF Court to have their voices heard on matters that had troubled them for a long time. It was an occasion to explain what happened and to have their accounts heard in public. The Committee hopes that the Inquiry will bring some measure of solace and closure to all of us. The Inquiry cannot bring back the lives and the homes that were lost in the fire, but the Committee believes that the findings and recommendations made in this Report will be treated seriously by the Government and the various stakeholders. The Committee hopes that the Inquiry will help to heal the wounds of many in Hong Kong brought about by the inferno. Despite the high price that has been paid, the time has come to learn from this tragedy and to start a new chapter in building a safer and better environment for all those who live in high-rise buildings in Hong Kong. We owe such responsibility to all those who lost their lives in this tragedy.

CHAPTER 2
SCOPE, WORK, PROCEDURE AND APPROACH OF THE INQUIRY

A. SCOPE, WORK AND PROCEDURE

25. The scope of the Inquiry has been defined in the following TOR announced by the CE:

(1) Regarding the fire broken out at WF Court in Tai Po, its rapid spread and the resulting casualties and property damage, to examine –

the causes and circumstances that led to the fire; the fire service installations and equipment in the buildings, and the supervision and responsibility for their effective operation; whether the construction safety requirements, standards, supervision and day-to-day maintenance regime for the building maintenance and renovation works were adequate; regarding the building maintenance and renovation works, whether the prevailing list of materials meeting safety standards is comprehensive, and whether the related verification and testing systems are effective; the roles and responsibilities of personnel with supervisory roles across all stages (including government officers, authorised professionals, contractors and others); and the liabilities arising from the aforementioned issues.

(2) Regarding large-scale building maintenance and renovation works, to examine –

whether there were systemic problems such as undue connected interests, conflicts of roles, or improper collusion across all stages of the works; and whether bid-rigging corruption, or irregularities were involved in the tendering process of these works.

(3) Regarding the two matters above, to examine whether regulation and penalties under relevant existing laws are adequate.

(4) To make recommendations regarding matters in items (1) to (3) above.

26. When announcing the formation of the Committee in December 2025, the CE requested the Committee to submit the Report within nine months after commencing operation.[3]

27. Following its appointment on 12 December 2025, the Committee appointed the Legal Team and held its first meeting on 19 December 2025 in its speedily set-up office on 10/F, Immigration Tower, Wan Chai.

3 Subsequently in August 2026, noting that the Committee has to reach its findings and conclusions over the numerous and complex issues under its TOR and formulate recommendations on the matters that are grounded in a factual framework, the CE has accepted that more time is required for it to analyse and study the large amount of information submitted by various parties. Accordingly, he has agreed for the Committee to submit its report before end of October 2026.

28. On 23 December 2025, the Committee attended WF Court for a site visit in order to learn more about the actual situation on the ground.

29. After the first meeting of the Committee, the Inquiry Solicitors sent letters to various concerned parties requesting them to supply materials and information relevant to the Inquiry. A list showing the entities/individuals that have been requested to supply materials and information is listed in **Annex 3** of this Report.

30. On 15 January 2026, the Committee attended another site visit at two construction sites to learn more about the differences between the use of bamboo scaffolding and metal scaffolding.

31. On 26 January 2026, the Committee issued a press release inviting the public to provide information on the causes and circumstances that led to the fire, its rapid spread and related issues in the period from 27 January to 10 February 2026. A total of 362 responses were received by the Committee.

32. On 5 February 2026, the Committee held the direction conference at City Gallery in Central to give directions on the various procedural matters relating to the conduct of the Evidential Hearing which would commence on 19 March 2026. The Committee had also set the deadline for applications by any individuals or organisations to be joined as Involved Parties participating in the Evidential Hearing.

33. All the applications by the residents of and persons relating to WF Court to be joined as Involved Parties had been granted. There was only one application by Mr Poon Chuk Hung Jason which was refused by the Committee. Mr Poon is neither a resident of nor has any connection with WF Court. Though he sought to make submissions and give evidence

relating to the tendering process of large-scale BMR works in general, the Committee did not consider that Mr Poon had sufficient interest or connection with WF Court to enable him to be joined as an Involved Party with the right to participate in the Evidential Hearing. In any event, the Committee would consider any written submissions and statements received, including those from Mr Poon, in considering the issues in this Inquiry.

34. A list showing members of the Committee's Legal Team, and all the Involved Parties of the Evidential Hearing with their legal representatives (if any) is included in **Annex 4** of this Report.

35. Pursuant to the directions given, the Evidential Hearing commenced on 19 March 2026.

36. There were a total of 30 days of Evidential Hearing organised in six rounds, with 80 witnesses giving their oral testimony. A table showing the dates of the six rounds of Evidential Hearing is included in **Annex 5** of this Report. The list of witnesses giving oral testimony in the hearing is included in **Annex 6** of this Report.

37. The Evidential Hearing was completed on 17 July 2026.

38. On 30 March 2026, the Secretariat issued another press release inviting the public to submit information and views, in the period from 31 March to 14 April 2026, on whether there were systemic problems such as undue connected interests, conflicts of roles, or improper collusion across all stages of large-scale BMR works (not limited to WF Court); and whether bid-rigging corruption, or irregularities were involved in the tendering process of the relevant works. A total of 58 responses were received by the Committee.

B. PARTICULAR CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE INQUIRY

39. The following considerations are of particular relevance in the conduct of the present Inquiry.

B1. Time for the submission of the Report

40. In appointing the Committee, the CE had made a specific request to the Committee to submit the Report within nine months.

41. This is perfectly understandable given the following:

(i) The WF Court fire was a devastating one claiming 168 lives. In terms of the number of fatalities, it is the most serious and tragic disaster in the recent history of Hong Kong. The public, including the residents of WF Court and all those who have lost their loved ones during the fire, would need to know as soon as possible the actual cause of the fire, the reasons for its rapid spread, the possible improprieties relating to the tendering process of large-scale BMR works and the recommendations to prevent similar disasters from happening again in the future.

(ii) Most people in Hong Kong are living in multi-storey buildings which would require large-scale BMR works to be done in some point in time. Indeed, there are now 20,000 buildings in Hong Kong which have a building age exceeding 30 years. There are numerous buildings undergoing large-scale BMR works at this moment, while some other building projects are now put on hold waiting for

the findings and the recommendations made in this Inquiry. Hence, there is a much wider public interest, which extends beyond the interest of the victims of the WF Court inferno, for the findings of the Inquiry to be published as soon as possible.

(iii) A speedy Inquiry would enable the Government and other related bodies to implement the necessary reforms and to take follow-up actions following the result of the Inquiry without further delay. These include, amongst other things: (a) the passing of legislation and introduction of administrative measures to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future; (b) the commencement of disciplinary proceedings (if any) against any civil servants; (c) the commencement and continuation of the criminal and civil proceedings against relevant parties; and (d) as the case may be, the handling of insurance claims relating to the fire.

42. Judging from the experience of similar incidents in Hong Kong and abroad, the Government, the Courts and other relevant entities would usually wait for the findings of a public inquiry before proceeding with any substantive follow-up actions. Hence, there is a high public expectation to know quickly why so many lives were claimed in the inferno, and for actions to be taken to make those responsible accountable for their wrongs.

43. Under such circumstances, the time factor plays a key role in determining how the Inquiry is conducted. The Committee has commenced the investigation for the Inquiry without any delay since its appointment. The Committee and the Legal Team have been working around the clock and have obtained more than one million files from

Government departments, contractors and other parties with the data size exceeding two terabytes (2 TB).

44. The Evidential Hearing was able to be held exactly three months after the Committee commenced its work. For those who are familiar with how a public inquiry works, this was quite extraordinary. In achieving such efficiency, the Committee must acknowledge the full cooperation of the Government and the Police, the ICAC and the CC (collectively referred to as the "Law Enforcement Agencies"). In the opening submissions of the Legal Team in the Evidential Hearing, the Legal Team was able to outline the voluminous evidence by then obtained by the Committee. In fact, most of such evidence was obtained from the Government and the Law Enforcement Agencies within the limited time before the commencement of the Evidential Hearing.

45. The Committee should also mention the cooperation and the assistance given by all the Involved Parties participating in the Evidential Hearing. They are referred to as the "Participating Involved Parties", as opposed to those Involved Parties who did not participate in the Evidential Hearing either by making oral submissions or giving oral testimonies, who are referred to as the "Non-Participating Involved Parties". Without the full cooperation of the Government, the Law Enforcement Agencies and the Participating Involved Parties, the Committee would not have been able to discharge its duty so efficiently.

46. The time constraints did not prevent the Inquiry from being conducted fairly and openly, allowing all the Involved Parties, the concerned parties and the general public to make proper representations to the Committee. There are also a large number of victims involved in the fire. They have lost their homes. Some of them have also lost their loved ones. The Committee had to design a process to allow the voices of these victims to be heard. Since there are more than 1,900 households in WF Court and

the Committee had a clear timetable to meet, the Committee had to make use of the time available for the Evidential Hearing economically, and to exercise appropriate judgment in deciding on the list of witnesses for the Evidential Hearing. Though not all the information received by the Committee has been presented in the Evidential Hearing, the Committee can assure the public that all the materials and information supplied by the public including the victims of the fire have been seriously considered. Given the number of lives claimed by the inferno, its devastating nature and its huge impact on the victims and the general public, it demands no less from the Committee.

47. The Evidential Hearing concluded on 17 July 2026 and the Report was submitted to the CE in October 2026. Without the unfailing effort of the Legal Team and the Secretariat, the full cooperation of the Government, the Law Enforcement Agencies and the Participating Involved Parties and the kind understanding of the public, the Committee does not believe that it could have completed the task within such a tight timeframe.

48. As further elaborated in the next sub-section, time is an important factor in deciding the way in which the Inquiry is conducted.

B2. Commission of Inquiry vs non-Commission of Inquiry

49. There are two ways for conducting a public inquiry. One is by way of setting up a Commission of Inquiry ("COI") under the Commission of Inquiry Ordinance (Cap. 86) ("COIO"). The COI has extensive powers under the COIO, including but not limited to compelling a particular person to testify at the inquiry or to produce documents to the commission. However, the COIO also specifies that proceedings before the COI are judicial proceedings. By reason of such feature, participating parties to the inquiry can take issue with various procedural matters delaying the progress of the inquiry. Judging from the experiences of similar

inquiries both locally and in other jurisdictions (in particular, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry in the United Kingdom), and further taking into account the number of victims involved, the areas required to be investigated in this Inquiry and the complexity of the issues, it is fair to say that this Inquiry, if conducted by way of setting up a COI, would require years to complete. The public simply cannot wait for that long.

50. Whilst the CE decided to set up the present Inquiry using the second method, that is, setting up an Independent Committee for the Inquiry without invoking the provisions under the COIO, the Committee's TOR make it clear that, in the course of the Inquiry, if the Committee is of the view that, in order to conduct an inquiry into specific issues or aspects, it is necessary to be provided with the same statutory powers as those of a COI, the Committee may make a recommendation to the CE. The CE-in-Council may, upon consideration, decide to enable the Committee to become a statutory COI for matters relevant to those issues or aspects pursuant to the COIO to exercise those powers.

51. Since the Committee is not set up under the COIO, the proceedings of the Inquiry are not judicial proceedings. This enables the Committee to have greater flexibility in dealing with the procedures for the Inquiry. In light of the challenges facing the Inquiry as mentioned above, the Committee considers that the present approach is appropriate in this particular Inquiry.

52. This is more so the case here as the Government, with its various bureaux and departments being the subjects of investigation in the Inquiry, has pledged full support and cooperation with the Inquiry.

53. The speed at which the present Inquiry was conducted speaks volumes about the advantages of the non-COI option. Yet, Prestige Construction & Engineering Co., Limited ("PC&E"), Will Power Architects Company Limited ("Will Power") and their key personnel (though they are Involved Parties) refused to give oral testimony in the Evidential Hearing. In fact, they did not appear in the Evidential Hearing at all. Hence, some expressed the view that the Committee should make a request to the CE to convert the Inquiry into a COI, thereby providing the Committee with the power under the COIO to compel them to testify at the hearing. Doing so would ensure that there were no missing pieces in this Inquiry.

54. The Committee understands that the public may wish to see the personal attendance of these "main culprits" in the Evidential Hearing. However, their oral testimony was not required for the Committee to understand their involvement in the Works at WF Court. One of the powers of a COI is its ability to compel a particular person to produce documents to the COI, without which the COI may not be able to ascertain the truth and therefore assess the responsibility of that particular person for the incident. However, since the Government and the Law Enforcement Agencies have provided without reservation all the necessary documents to the Committee, the Committee was able to ascertain the roles played by the key parties, i.e. PC&E and Will Power, in the Works at WF Court even without their oral testimony.

55. Natural justice requires that both PC&E and Will Power should be informed of the accusations against them and be given the opportunity to present their respective cases and evidence to the Committee. From the materials presented in the Evidential Hearing, these parties knew full well the accusations against them. If they decided not to give oral testimony to defend these accusations, the Committee would still be able to make adverse findings against them based on the materials already possessed by the Committee.

56. One has to understand that there are both pros and cons of turning the Inquiry into a COI. It is usually the legal considerations of the cons that may not be easily understood.

57. First, as mentioned above, a non-COI inquiry would reduce the number of unnecessary procedural objections that may be taken by the involved parties, which could very well delay the progress of the inquiry. Though a COI can order certain unwilling witnesses to give oral testimony, it cannot compel cooperation on their part or on the part of their legal representatives. If they refuse to give any witness statements before the hearing or only produce the requested documents on the witness stand, the hearing would probably have to proceed in a fragmented manner, resulting in substantial delays. With late production of oral testimony and documents, other relevant parties would be entitled to ask for an adjournment of the hearing to enable them to carry out corresponding investigations in reply. Further, substantial time would have to be spent in the hearing for the examination and cross-examination of witnesses if they are trying to shift their responsibility to other individuals, and further delays may be caused if notification has to be given to such other persons to defend any allegation made against them. As has occurred in many legal proceedings, a COI may easily become one led and dominated by the parties and their legal representatives, instead of one led by the committee in a non-COI inquiry.

58. The experience of similar inquiries in other jurisdictions shows that these are serious concerns and not just fanciful speculation made by an over-cautious committee.

59. According to the Committee's estimates, if the Inquiry were to be conducted in the form of a COI from the outset, it would require at least six months for the preparation of the first Evidential Hearing, and the

Evidential Hearing itself would take at least twice the time needed, as more witnesses might have to be called.

60. Seeing how the Inquiry had proceeded so smoothly in the first four rounds, there were by then some voices from the public requesting the Inquiry be converted into a COI, believing that it would not substantially delay the conclusion of the Inquiry.

61. Unfortunately, that would not be the case. Due to the complexity of the issues involved in this Inquiry, it would be highly disordered and not without risk from a legal point of view to carve out certain issues for the conduct of a separate COI. Further, in order to avoid any possible legal challenges, sufficient notification would have to be given to parties previously unwilling to give evidence to enable them to prepare their respective cases if the Inquiry were to be converted into a COI in the middle of the proceedings. There may be further delays if there is any application for discovery of documents or recalling of witnesses, which they may have the right to make if supported by sufficient justifications.

62. The Committee estimates that if the Inquiry were to be converted into a COI in the middle of the proceedings, the hearing would require at least twice as much time to complete. Even if only witnesses relevant to Clause 1 of the TOR ("TOR1") Inquiry (as defined below) were to be summoned, the earliest expected time for submitting the Report would be delayed to the second quarter of 2027.

63. The Committee wishes to emphasise that, as shown by the experience of similar inquiries in other jurisdictions, this is only an estimate and not a guarantee. If the Committee is required to carry out more detailed investigations as to whether there were unlawful or improper conducts in respect of the tendering process of specifically the Works at

WF Court (this subject is discussed further in the next section of this Chapter), the estimated time required would definitely be much longer.

64. The public and the media have described the conversion of the Inquiry into a COI as "upgrading" the Inquiry. In the opinion of the Committee, the use of such a term may not be appropriate, as it risks giving a misleading impression that the present non-COI Inquiry is an inferior type of inquiry. One must bear in mind that the main purpose of a public inquiry is to find out what happened and why a tragedy occurred. The Committee believes that, with the dedicated effort of the Legal Team, the voluminous evidence revealed in the Evidential Hearing is sufficient for the Committee and the public to understand what actually happened on the day of and prior to the fire, and what caused the tragic loss of life and property.

65. COI and legal proceedings have their advantages. With the power to summon parties who are unwilling to testify in the hearing, a COI may perhaps help the public to understand the role played by individual persons in respect of each identified factor responsible for the cause of the fire and its rapid spread. For example, whether Mr Hau Wa Kin of PC&E was personally involved in giving instructions for the erection of the access openings in the staircases.

66. Yet, it is not the function of a public inquiry to determine the criminal or civil liability of individuals. Such questions would be dealt with in separate criminal or civil proceedings. For the purposes of this Inquiry, the Committee is able to ascertain from the existing materials that PC&E was responsible for erecting the access openings in the staircases, and Mr Hau Wa Kin and Mr Ho Kin Yip Gordon ("Mr Gordon Ho") were the main persons responsible for the operation of PC&E.

67. Mr Hau Wa Kin and Mr Gordon Ho were arrested for certain offences relating to their roles in the BMR project at WF Court. The longer the Inquiry takes to conclude, there may be greater delay to the progress of the criminal investigations and proceedings. As shown by the experience in other jurisdictions, delay in justice will be a serious concern.

68. Apart from the delay that may be caused to the prosecution of the criminal proceedings, compelling unwilling persons to testify in the Inquiry may complicate the criminal proceedings themselves. In addition to the possible legal challenges that may be taken by those individuals, the courts in the criminal proceedings may have to face the additional burden of examining the evidence given by the unwilling parties in the Inquiry, to the extent that such evidence is admissible. In the opinion of the Committee, it would be more desirable for the personal liability of these unwilling parties to be determined in any subsequent legal proceedings.

69. In fact, the non-COI option has other advantages as well. As the Evidential Hearing is not a legal proceeding, the Committee has more flexibility in dealing with the way in which witnesses give evidence. Since the witness statements have been uploaded to the Committee's website, the Committee can dispense with the need to formally read all the contents of the witness statements in the hearing (as it is usually the case in COI hearings), thereby saving considerable time. Further, as the present Inquiry has attracted a lot of public attention, the use of the non-COI option means that the press would have more flexibility in reporting the proceedings (for example, reporting the views of the residents of WF Court about various aspects of the Evidential Hearing), without worrying about the danger of publishing statements which may interfere with the administration of justice.

70. Throughout the Inquiry, the Committee had repeatedly indicated that it would keep all its options open. Indeed, as there might be different challenges facing the Committee, some of them unforeseeable at the outset, the Committee had to be flexible and adjust the approach of the Inquiry depending on the progress of the investigation. Given that the main objective of the Inquiry is to find out what happened and why, deciding how the Inquiry was to be conducted to achieve that purpose was very much a strategic decision, balancing all the pros and cons mentioned above and taking into account the various considerations mentioned in this Chapter, in particular the tight timeframe for the submission of the Report.

71. Having considered all the evidence obtained in the first four rounds of the Evidential Hearing, and having finalised the approach to be taken in the fact-finding exercise for Clause 2 of the TOR ("TOR2") Inquiry (as defined below), the Committee announced on the first day of the fifth round of the Evidential Hearing on 22 June 2026 that it would not make a request to the CE to convert the Inquiry into a COI. The Committee believes that it would be in the best interests of the public to reap the fruits of the first four rounds of the Evidential Hearing, which had proceeded efficiently, and to proceed with the Inquiry in its existing format, so that its findings can be published as soon as possible.

B3. Effect of the Inquiry on the other parallel investigations and proceedings

72. The Inquiry was proceeding concurrently with the investigations by the Law Enforcement Agencies about the WF Court fire.

73. After the inferno, the Law Enforcement Agencies had made a number of arrests of persons who might be involved in some sort of unlawful acts causing the spread and high casualties of the fire, or other

improper or unlawful conduct relating to the tendering process for the Works at WF Court and other large-scale BMR projects.[4]

74. The task of the Inquiry is to find out what happened and why. As provided for in the TOR, the Inquiry is not to determine any person's civil or criminal liability. Yet, the Committee is not inhibited in the discharge of its functions by any likelihood of liability being inferred from the facts the Committee finds or the recommendations it makes. The role of the Inquiry is, therefore, different from those of the Law Enforcement Agencies, though they are carrying out investigations into the same events.

75. Whilst the Law Enforcement Agencies have provided full co-operation to the Committee by providing the requested documents, the Committee and the Legal Team are fully aware of the risk that the disclosure of documents supplied by the Law Enforcement Agencies may have an adverse impact on the parallel investigations and proceedings. It would not be in the public interest for someone to escape criminal or civil liability by claiming that, because of the disclosure of such documents in the Inquiry, the persons concerned are not able to obtain a fair trial.

76. The Committee believes that the Inquiry and the Law Enforcement Agencies have managed to find ways in which they can assist each other without compromising their respective functions.

77. As required by the statutory provisions in the Coroners Ordinance (Cap. 504), certain deaths have to be reported to the Coroner who may order an investigation into the cause of death by way of death inquest.

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4 Apart from the proceedings mentioned in para 104 below, the Police and the ICAC have laid charges in June 2026 against seven individuals (including the RI of the Works at WF Court) and two companies (the respective consultancy firm and the main contractor of the Works at WF Court) with a total of 25 counts of offences, including manslaughter, conspiracy to defraud, "money laundering", attempting to pervert the course of public justice and tax evasion.

The Committee is not aware of the progress of any death inquest. In any event, even though the Committee and the Coroner investigate the same event, they work independently. In particular, it is wholly a matter for the Coroner to decide whether he or she would hold death inquests in view of the findings made in this Inquiry.

78. Further, as mentioned above, it would be in the public interest for the Inquiry to be completed as soon as possible, so that it would not unduly delay the investigations and the progress of the parallel legal proceedings.

B4. Principles to be observed in conducting a public inquiry

79. Though the present Inquiry was not conducted by way of a COI, there are still a number of common law principles that the Committee should follow in conducting the present Inquiry, which is public in nature.

80. The first principle is that, in keeping with the practice of public inquiries in the past, hearings should be accessible to the public. Apart from the open hearings at the Multi-purpose Hall of the City Gallery, the hearings were also broadcast simultaneously at the ground floor of the City Gallery and the Lecture Theatre of the Hong Kong Central Library. Without prejudice to considerations such as other proceedings (such as criminal investigations) and personal privacy, all witness statements, replies of various relevant parties and the written submissions made by the Legal Team and the legal representatives of the Involved Parties were published on the Committee's website. Further, arrangements were made for proceedings to be transcribed and for the transcripts to be made available through the Committee's website generally on the same day of the hearing.

81. The Committee acknowledges that there was demand for live broadcasting of the Evidential Hearing on the internet. Whilst this would have been more convenient to some members of the public, including the residents of WF Court, the Committee made a difficult decision against doing so.

82. Live broadcasting of the proceedings would make it impossible to police any unauthorised recording of the hearings. One cannot ignore the danger of some members of the public quoting part of the recordings out of context, which may have a serious and adverse impact on the parallel investigations and proceedings. The decision against live broadcasting also avoids the danger of parallel trials or "trial by public". Indeed, some witnesses became the subject of doxxing or of unsubstantiated allegations made on social media. In the opinion of the Committee, live broadcasting of the proceedings would only make matters worse. These are the reasons why, despite the latest technology available, courts around the world are still reluctant to broadcast legal proceedings live, in particular when the hearings concerned are not appellate proceedings. The Committee therefore adopted the same practice as in previous inquiries, whether conducted by way of a COI or not, in not streaming the hearings live on the internet. With the various measures of open access to the proceedings adopted by the Committee, coupled with wide media coverage of the Inquiry, the Committee believes that the proceedings are open and transparent and that everyone who wants to know what happened in the proceedings is able to do so without much difficulty.

83. The Committee has also tried to accommodate the demands of the residents of WF Court to attend the hearings in person. Whilst there were insufficient seats for all 1,900-plus households, about half of the seats available to the public in the Evidential Hearing were first allocated to the residents of WF Court to partly meet the demand.

84. The Committee did not see the need to conduct any parts of the hearings in private. None of the evidence received at the Evidential Hearing for the purpose of the making of the findings in this Report is confidential in nature.

85. The second principle is that, as a matter of natural justice, all parties which may be subject to criticism in this Inquiry should be given the opportunity to present evidence, to challenge the evidence and to answer the allegations against them in the Inquiry. The Legal Team sent express invitations to those likely to be criticised in the Report to provide response or to apply to be joined as Involved Parties in the Evidential Hearing. As mentioned above, the list of Involved Parties together with their legal representatives (if any) can be found in **Annex 4** of this Report.

86. Further, since there is no complaint sheet or pleading in a public inquiry, the Legal Team had to find a way to inform all parties which may be subject to criticism of the evidence against them. The Legal Team did so by setting out the evidence or possible criticisms against the relevant parties in the opening submissions as far as possible. Such an approach is consistent with the principle of natural justice. As repeatedly emphasised by the Committee in the Evidential Hearing, those possible criticisms are not the final conclusions of the Committee.

87. Third, in keeping with the public nature of the Inquiry, the public has been invited to submit relevant information, materials, views and proposed recommendations in respect of the various matters covered by the Inquiry. As mentioned above, the Committee had issued press releases on two occasions inviting the public to provide materials and opinions.

88. The Committee believes that the Inquiry was conducted in an efficient, open and transparent manner. All the relevant principles of natural justice have been observed and the Inquiry was conducted fairly.

The Inquiry also covered all the relevant matters which are required to be investigated under the TOR.

C. APPROACH OF THE INQUIRY

C1. The difference in approach in the two broad areas

89. According to the TOR, there are two broad areas that the Committee is required to investigate.

90. The first area is set out in TOR1, which requires the Committee to review and examine the causes of the fire in WF Court, the reasons for its rapid spread and the high casualties resulting from the fire. TOR1 also requires the Committee to examine the roles and responsibilities of the relevant personnel with supervisory roles and their associated liabilities. In this Report, the Committee will refer to this as the "TOR1 Inquiry".

91. The second area is set out in TOR2, which requires the Committee to ascertain, in respect of large-scale BMR works, whether there are any systemic problems, bid-rigging or other irregularities associated with the tendering process of such works. In this Report, the Committee will refer to this as the "TOR2 Inquiry".

92. Clauses 3 and 4 of the TOR are only incidental in nature, requiring the Committee to examine, in respect of the matters covered in the TOR1 Inquiry and the TOR2 Inquiry, whether the regulation and penalties under the existing laws are adequate, and to make the recommendations in respect of all the matters covered by the Inquiry.

93. The TOR1 Inquiry and the TOR2 Inquiry are quite different in focus. The TOR1 Inquiry requires the Committee to examine what actually happened in respect of the fire in WF Court. On the other hand, the TOR2 Inquiry requires the Committee to review what happened in respect of large-scale BMR works in Hong Kong in general.

94. Due to their different focus, it would be logical for the Committee to divide the Inquiry into two parts, namely, the TOR1 Inquiry and the TOR2 Inquiry.

95. In planning the conduct of the Inquiry, the Committee considered whether it should further divide the TOR1 Inquiry into two parts, with the first part focusing on the cause of the fire and the reasons for its rapid spread and high casualties, and the second part on the responsibilities of relevant personnel. However, since there would be a considerable overlap of evidence and issues between the two parts, the Committee decided to conduct the Evidential Hearing for the TOR1 Inquiry in one part commencing on 19 March 2026.

96. For the TOR2 Inquiry, the Committee considered how it should proceed in gathering evidence for its findings. Given the time constraint and indeed as a matter of practicality, the Committee cannot examine each individual large-scale BMR project in Hong Kong in detail to ascertain whether there was any unlawful or improper conduct involved. When the Committee first approached the Law Enforcement Agencies for information, they informed the Committee that they had obtained considerable data and materials about such unlawful and improper conduct from the various investigations that they had conducted throughout the years. Though some of their investigations might not have resulted in criminal prosecutions or other enforcement actions, the information they obtained is most relevant to the matters that have to be investigated under the TOR2 Inquiry.

97. Having perused the various reports submitted by the Law Enforcement Agencies, the Committee is of the view that the information provided in these reports provides a good basis for the Committee to make some significant findings about the matters covered by the TOR2 Inquiry. The Committee is fully aware that some of the "facts" contained in these reports are hearsay evidence. However, the Committee takes the view that a significant portion of the observations made in these reports are supported by objective facts, for example, Will Power obtained the consultancy contract by submitting an unusually low bid, and thereafter arranged a Registered Inspector ("RI"), who only had minimal participation in the supervision of the project. The Committee believes that some of these unusual features do support the conclusion that there are widespread anti-competitive practices in the tendering of large-scale BMR works in Hong Kong.

98. In conducting the TOR2 Inquiry, the Committee did not specifically call individual witnesses to testify on the subjects to be investigated, although evidence given by some witnesses testified during the Evidential Hearing touched upon possible collusion activities in the Works at WF Court. Meanwhile, the Committee provided the Involved Parties (and indeed the public) with the reports and studies prepared by the Law Enforcement Agencies, so that they could make representations to the Committee if they disagreed with the proposed conduct of the TOR2 Inquiry or the observations made in these reports or studies. No Involved Party raised any objection to these matters, and the TOR2 Inquiry was accordingly conducted in the said proposed manner.

99. More importantly, the Committee takes the view that, even if, contrary to its findings under the "broad brush" approach, there turns out to be indeed no widespread unlawful or improper practices relating to the tendering of large-scale BMR works in Hong Kong, it would not frustrate the objective of this Inquiry. Due to the wide media coverage on this

subject, the public in general is under the strong impression that bid-rigging, unlawful and improper activities have been present in the tendering of large-scale BMR works in Hong Kong. In other words, the general public has lost its confidence in the integrity and propriety of the tendering system itself and the BMR industry in general. In order to restore such confidence, the Government should introduce reforms on the assumption that the practices and activities outlined in the reports and studies of the Law Enforcement Agencies are common in Hong Kong. In any event, as further elaborated in Chapter 13 of this Report, there are strong reasons for the Committee to believe that these dubious practices do exist in Hong Kong.

C2. Further investigation by the Inquiry on the possible unlawful conduct relating to the tendering of the Works at WF Court

100. Though there is a public expectation that the Committee should make specific findings as to whether there were any unlawful, improper or bid rigging activities associated with the tendering of the Works at WF Court, the Committee has decided that these matters should be left for investigation by the Law Enforcement Agencies. It would be undesirable, and indeed contrary to the public interest, for the Committee to spend significantly more time, the length of which cannot be ascertained at this stage, to pursue such matters.

101. First, TOR2 requires the Committee to examine what actually happened in respect of large-scale BMR works in Hong Kong in general, and not to focus solely on what happened in respect of the Works at WF Court. In the opinion of the Committee, TOR2 makes a lot of practical sense for the reasons elaborated below.

102. The Law Enforcement Agencies are undoubtedly best equipped to investigate these matters. Bid-rigging relating to the tendering

of large-scale BMR works and the associated improper or unlawful activities are by nature difficult to detect. These sorts of activities are usually only known to a select few. Unless someone in these small circles is prepared to supply information to the Law Enforcement Agencies, most of these activities would remain covert and undetected. Yet, once some leads are obtained by the Law Enforcement Agencies by way of reports or intelligence, they are able to carry out investigations using the necessary powers granted to them by law. In fact, much of the evidence revealed in this Inquiry was actually supplied by the Law Enforcement Agencies.

103. One has to appreciate that even a COI established under the COIO does not have such extensive investigative powers. It would be inefficient, and indeed impossible, for a public inquiry to investigate these covert activities. Apart from the many procedural objections that parties may raise to challenge the production of certain materials in a public inquiry, the time it would take for the completion of such an investigation would be extremely long and unpredictable.

104. As indicated by Mr Lester Lee, Executive Director (Legal Services) of the CC, in the Evidential Hearing, the CC has commenced proceedings in the Competition Tribunal ("CT") in March 2026 against undertakings and individuals related to a bid-rigging syndicate in the building maintenance sector.[5] The case involved various housing estates and buildings including WF Court. The CC is continuing to investigate whether there were any unlawful acts committed relating to the tendering of the Works at WF Court, and Mr Lee asks for patience of the public in this regard. The Committee fully appreciates that investigations of this kind take time, and it would be difficult for the Committee to make any specific findings about certain individuals before the completion of the case. The Committee therefore takes the view that the individual liability of any

5 The case is CTEA 1 of 2026 commenced in the CT.

persons involved in possible unlawful activities in respect of the tendering process of the Works at WF Court should be left for determination in subsequent criminal and enforcement proceedings, if any are brought.

105. Second, it would be impracticable to expect that the Committee could finish the full-scale investigations into the bid-rigging, unlawful and improper activities relating to the tendering of the Works at WF Court in nine to ten months' time. The investigations would involve a lot of different parties. As the Inquiry has to observe the principles of natural justice, the Inquiry would easily be turned into a series of quasi-criminal trials against these individuals. It would probably take years to complete the inquiry relating to the Works at WF Court, and it would not be in the public interest for the Committee to do so.

106. One name has been mentioned many times in the Inquiry and its related media coverage, namely, Madam Wong Pik Kiu[6]. The Committee acknowledges that there is strong public sentiment about the conduct of Madam Wong, who was a member of the Tai Po District Council at the time when the works contract was awarded to PC&E. It was revealed in the Inquiry that Madam Wong was very active in obtaining proxy instruments (commonly referred to as proxy votes) from the residents for the owners' meetings appointing the building professional. The residents and indeed the public suspected that Madam Wong might have been involved in some improper activities relating to the tendering of the Works at WF Court. The Committee noted that after the completion of Evidential Hearing, there were media reports alleging Madam Wong or her associates having obtained proxy votes from owners who had already passed away at the time of the relevant owners' meetings, and the Police are said to have followed up on the allegations according to the established practice.

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6 Madam Wong Pik Kiu resigned from office as a District Councillor on 26 September 2026.

107. In the Evidential Hearing, the Legal Team invited various residents of WF Court to testify and give their views on this matter. Given the concern of the residents of WF Court, it was indeed a legitimate topic to pursue in the Inquiry.

108. The Committee sent requests to Madam Wong Pik Kiu inviting her to respond to the "allegations" made against her. Madam Wong replied, admitting that she had helped the Incorporated Owners ("IO") to collect proxy votes for owners' meetings. As a District Councillor, she would provide assistance to the residents in her district on building management matters. She denied any unlawful or improper conduct on her part.

109. Having considered all the materials collected in the Inquiry, the Committee does not consider that there is sufficient basis for converting the Inquiry into a COI for the purpose of summoning Madam Wong Pik Kiu to testify in the Inquiry.

110. As mentioned above, TOR2 does not require the Committee to conduct a specific inquiry into the personal liability of any individuals in respect of the tendering of the Works at WF Court. If such specific inquiry were be conducted, many more persons (including the members of the Management Committee ("MC") mentioned in the Evidential Hearing, Mr Hau Wa Kin of PC&E and Mr Wong Hap Yin Jason ("Jason Wong") of Will Power and Madam Wong Pik Kiu's associates allegedly to have assisted in the collection of proxy votes from the owners) would have to be summoned to testify as well, turning the Inquiry into a set of complicated legal proceedings the progress of which would probably be led and dominated by the parties and their legal advisers and not by the Committee.

111. As the Committee sees it, some members of the public would like to see the personal attendance of Madam Wong Pik Kiu in the Evidential Hearing so that she can offer her explanation in public. That is what they expect from a public figure in Madam Wong's position. However, from a legal point of view, the Committee has to assess whether there is a *prima facie* case supporting some sort of unlawful or improper conduct on her part. The fact that there were a large number of proxy votes, or that certain members of the MC might favour a particular consultant or contractor, does not by itself prove that there were unlawful or bid rigging activities in the tendering of the large-scale BMR works. It would be a different matter if any relevant person had obtained financial benefit from securing proxy votes from the residents, but this sort of complaint is best dealt with by the Law Enforcement Agencies, which are equipped with the necessary powers to investigate such covert activities.

112. As repeatedly emphasised by the Committee, the Inquiry has to be conducted fairly and openly. The Committee has to be fair to all parties, including the victims of the tragic incident and the persons under investigation. In making any decision, the Committee should only be guided by proper legal considerations and public interest concerns. Political and public relations management considerations should not have any role to play in the decision-making process. That is what the Committee has done in the present Inquiry.

113. The Committee believes that, if any person relating to the tendering of the Works at WF Court is guilty of misconduct, there will be appropriate occasions in the future for them to answer the allegations against them in public.

C3. Approach of the Committee in analysing the facts in the Inquiry

114. The Committee is not constituted as a COI under the COIO. Nevertheless, its fact-finding function is materially akin to that of a statutory commission. The proceedings in the Inquiry are basically inquisitorial in nature with a view to finding out the truth. No party before the Committee carries a formal burden of proof. The Committee's task is to inquire into the matters set out in the TOR, to receive and evaluate the evidence placed before it, and to make findings according to objective standards.[7]

115. Public inquiries have consistently reserved to themselves the flexibility to determine what standard of proof they require in order to make their findings. The standard of proof applicable to the Committee's findings of facts is, in general, the civil standard: the balance of probabilities. A fact is established if the Committee is satisfied that it is more probable than not.[8]

116. The standard is not, however, applied mechanically. It calls for a degree of satisfaction which varies according to the gravity of the facts to be established.[9] Public inquiries may also, in appropriate circumstances, call for a higher standard for specific issues of particular gravity.[10] However, the Committee does not consider it necessary to adopt

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7 See: *Securities and Futures Commission v Cheng Chak Ngok* [2018] 4 HKLRD 612, *per* Cheung JA para 9.9 and *Riady, Tjondro Stephen v Insider Dealing Tribunal* (unrep., CACV 310/2002, 9 January 2003).

8 See: the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Allegations relating to The Hong Kong Institute of Education (2007) para 2.18; the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Collision of Vessels near Lamma Island on 1 October 2012 (2013) para 32; and the Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Construction Works at and near the Hung Hom Station Extension under the Shatin to Central Link Project (2020) para 116.

9 See: *HKSAR v Lee Ming Tee* (2003) 6 HKCFAR 336 pages 361-362 *per* Sir Anthony Mason NPJ.

10 See: Commissions of Inquiry in Hong Kong by Ian Pennicott and Calvin Cheuk, paras 7-24.

a higher standard in the present case, as most of the facts relevant to the attribution of responsibility or criticisms of the conduct of specific entities or stakeholders (whether in the construction industry, property management sector, or supervisory regimes) are not challenged by the Involved Parties in the Evidential Hearing. Further, though Mr Hau Wa Kin and Mr Gordon Ho did supply the Committee with some brief witness statements, they have not come forward to give oral testimony in the Evidential Hearing and to answer the specific allegations made against PC&E and them. Their denials of responsibility therefore carry very little weight in the proceedings.

117. There are some factual disputes in the oral testimony between the witnesses from ISS EastPoint Properties Limited ("ISS") (the property management company ("PMC") of WF Court at the relevant time) and Victory Fire Engineering Limited ("Victory Fire") (the RFSIC for conducting annual inspection of the FSIs at WF Court before the fire) about what happened before the fire. Insofar as those disputes are concerned, the Committee applied the ordinary civil standard of proof in resolving them. But, as further elaborated in Chapter 10, it would not be necessary for the Committee to resolve the relevant factual disputes in assessing the responsibility of the parties.

118. There is in fact very little dispute about the facts in this Inquiry. Most of the matters, such as the contractual relationships of the parties (a list of all individuals and parties mentioned in the Report is at **Annex 7**), the complaints received by the different Government departments and public bodies in respect of the Works at WF Court, the sequence of events on the day of the fire, the cause and the origin of the fire and the reasons for its rapid spread and heavy casualties, are not in dispute. For these reasons, the contents in some parts of this Report, in particular those in Chapters 4 and 5 on the Works at WF Court and what happened on the day of the fire, are basically reproduced from the corresponding parts in the very detailed written closing submissions of the Legal Team.

CHAPTER 3
GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF WF COURT

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

119. WF Court is a residential development of the Hong Kong Housing Authority ("HA")[11] under the Home Ownership Scheme ("HOS").[12] It is located at 3821 Tai Po Road, Yuen Chau Tsai, Tai Po. WF Court faces Yuen Chau Tsai Park and Tolo Harbour to the east, whereas Kwong Fuk Estate and Tolo Highway are situated to its north and south respectively. Photos of WF Court before the fire are at Figures 3-1(a) and 3-1(b). A map showing WF Court location is at Figure 3-2.



Figure 3-1(a): WF Court before the fire

11 The HA is a statutory organisation tasked to develop and implement public housing programme to help the Government achieve its policy objective on public housing.

12 The HA introduced the HOS in 1978 to meet the home ownership needs of eligible low- to middle-income families.



Figure 3-1(b): WF Court before the fire

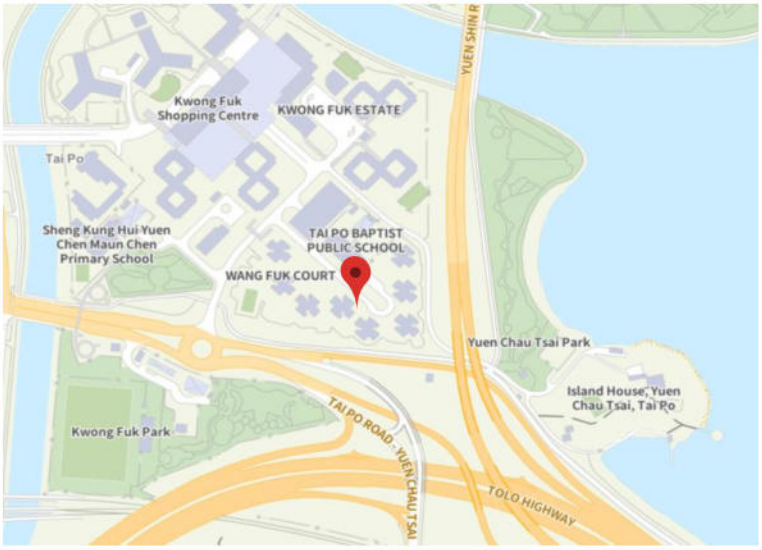


Figure 3-2: Location of WF Court

120. Completed in 1983, WF Court comprises eight blocks: Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E), Wang Cheong House (Block F), Wang Shing House (Block G), and Wang Chi House (Block H). The distribution of the eight blocks is at Figure 3-3.

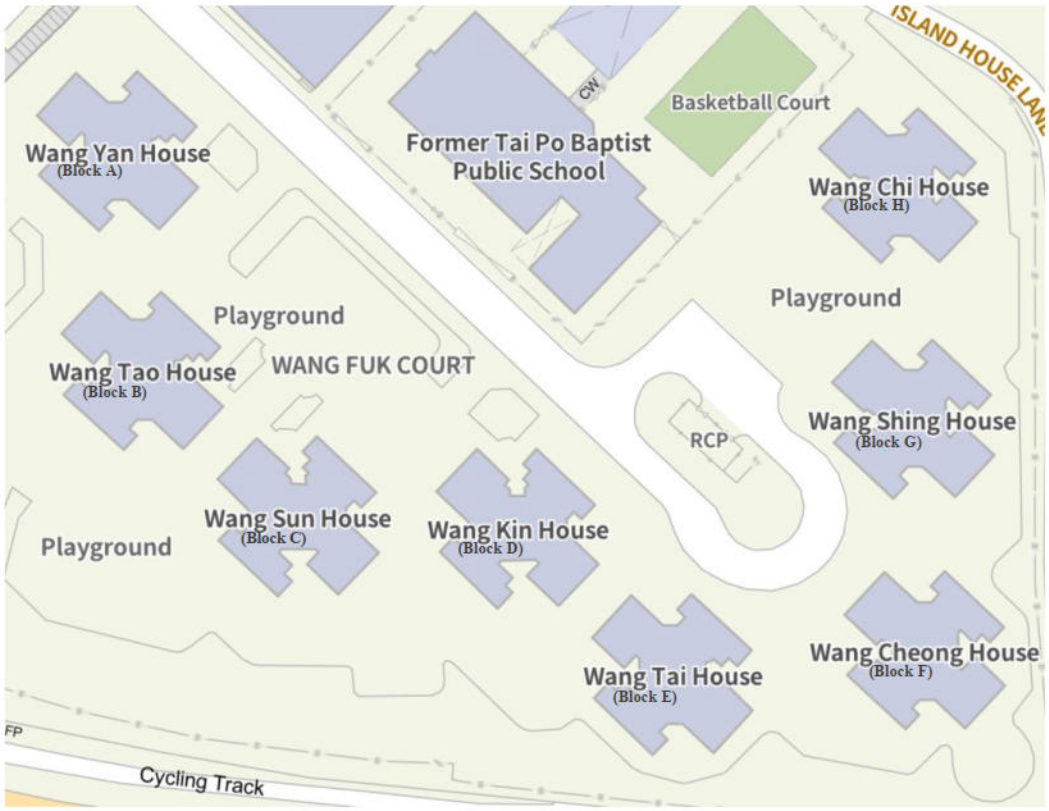


Figure 3-3: Distribution of the eight blocks at WF Court

121. Each block is 32-storey tall (i.e. G/F, 1/F to 31/F), with eight units on each floor from 1/F to 31/F. A total of 1,984 units are provided in eight blocks. The typical floor plan of Wang Cheong House (Block F), which closely resembles the floor plans of other blocks in WF Court, is at Figure 3-4.

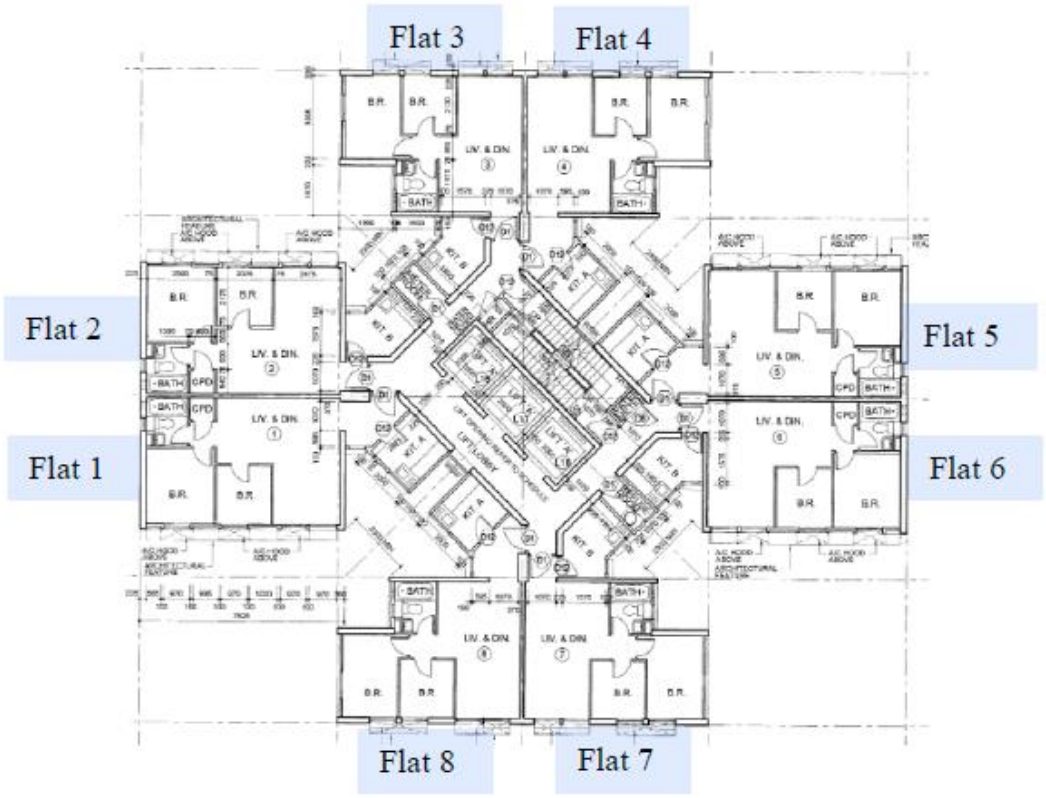


Figure 3-4: Floor plan of Wang Cheong House (Block F)

122. There are four wings in each block, with each wing comprising two domestic flats and connecting to the lift lobby. There is a re-entrant between two wings and there are four re-entrants on the exterior of each block extending from the 1/F to the roof. Locations of the re-entrants are shown in Figure 3-5.



Figure 3-5: Locations of re-entrants

123. There are two staircases arranged in a scissor configuration at each block of WF Court.[13] Only one provides access to the roof, while the other terminates at 31/F.[14] At each staircase landing, a marking showing the corresponding floor level is provided, as shown in Figure 3-6. Each building is provided with three firemen's lifts, each reaching different floors. They collectively provide access to all floors of the building.



Figure 3-6: Staircase Landing of 10/F, Wang Kin House (Block D) (Before the Renovation Works)

13 Two independent, interlocking flights of stairs stacked vertically.

14 On the ground floor, one staircase provides access to the lift lobby and the main building entrance, while another staircase leads to the rear exit. The rear exit features a smoke-stop door fitted with a horizontal bolt, as shown in Figure 3-7. A door sensor, which is not equipped with a locking mechanism, is also installed at this exit. When the door is opened, it triggers an audible buzzer and/or transmits a signal to the management office. This door sensor is not connected to, nor does it form part of, any FSI. It is installed exclusively for security and property management purposes.



Figure 3-7: Rear Exit at Wang Cheong House (Block F)

124. On every floor, one window is provided in the staircase and another window is provided in the lift lobby. One of the re-entrants is located immediately outside the lift lobby window, as shown in Figures 3-8 to 3-10, whereas another re-entrant is located immediately outside the staircase window, as shown in Figures 3-11 to 3-13. In accordance with the prevailing standard on fire resisting construction at the time of construction of WF Court, the upper parts of the lift lobby windows and the staircase windows of the eight blocks were openable, while the lower parts of the windows were fixed light as shown in Figures 3-8 and 3-11.

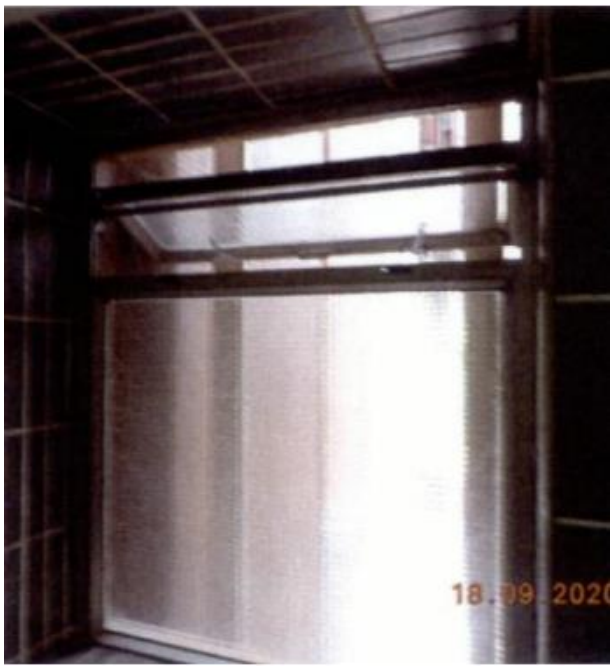


Figure 3-8: Lift Lobby Window (Before the Renovation Works)



Figure 3-9: Lift Lobby Window (Photo Taken After the Fire)



Figure 3-10: Location of Lift Lobby Window on Floor Plan



Figure 3-11: Staircase Window (Before the Renovation Works)



Figure 3-12: Staircase Window (Photo Taken After the Fire)



Figure 3-13: Location of Staircase Window on Floor Plan

125. All blocks of WF Court are provided with the following FSIs in accordance with the requirements applicable at the time of WF Court's development :

(i) Manual Fire Alarm System ("FAS");

(ii) Fire Hydrant/Hose Reel System ("FHHRS");

(iii) Fire Extinguisher; and

(iv) Emergency Lighting System.[15]

15 The provision of Emergency Lighting System is not a mandatory requirement.

CHAPTER 4
THE BUILDING MAINTENANCE AND RENOVATION WORKS AT WANG FUK COURT

126. WF Court was undergoing BMR works at the time of the fire. In this Chapter, the Committee will set out the key facts relating to such works. They will cover how the Works at WF Court came about and the conditions and progress of such Works at the time of the fire.

127. This Chapter is concerned with establishing facts, not with resolving questions of causation or responsibility. The contribution of the combustible envelope to the fire spread, and the contribution of the access openings in the staircases and disabled fire alarms to the loss of life, are addressed in Chapters 5 and 6. The responsibilities of various stakeholders are examined in Chapters 10 and 11.

128. The structure of this Chapter is as follows:

(i) Section A: Identification of relevant parties and their respective roles in relation to the Works at WF Court;

(ii) Section B: The tender process for the Works; and

(iii) Section C: The state of the Works at WF Court prior to the fire, including the condition of materials on the scaffolding, the creation of access openings in the staircases and the operational status of the FSIs.

129. In 2014, the buildings in WF Court were selected as target buildings under the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme ("MBIS"). Statutory notices ("SNs") under Section 30B of the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) ("BO") were subsequently issued by the BD on 10 June 2016,

mandating the IO of WF Court to arrange for the inspection and repair of the common areas and external walls of all eight blocks of WF Court.

130. Inspections were undertaken and completed in 2019, whereby necessary repairs were identified. A consultant company (which would engage RI as required under the MBIS - see paragraph 134 below) was subsequently appointed in 2021 to design and supervise the Works. In 2024, a main contractor was appointed to carry out the Works. The Works commenced in mid-2024, and remained in progress until the day of the fire on 26 November 2025. A comprehensive timeline of events related to the Works is set out in Sections B and C of this Chapter.

131. The Works do not constitute mere background to the fire. The tender process described in Section B was controversial and gave rise to concerns of bid-rigging and collusion. Section C concerns the status of the Works, which is central to understanding how a localised fire on the façade of one block came to engulf seven of the eight residential blocks of WF Court at unprecedented speed and scale. By the time of the fire, the Works had enclosed all eight blocks in a combustible envelope: bamboo scaffolding was sheathed in safety nets and combustible foam boards were placed over windows. Section C of this Chapter examines how these materials were selected, and why a substantial portion of them failed to comply with fire retardancy requirements.

132. The Works bear on the tragedy in another respect. In the course of the Works, access openings were created approximately every five floors in the staircases to facilitate workers' access to/from the scaffolds. The FSIs at WF Court, in particular the FASs serving the individual blocks, were disabled. Section C examines the circumstances surrounding these critical fire safety deficiencies.

A. PARTIES AND THEIR ROLES

133. The key companies involved in the Works and FSI works at WF Court were:

(i) Will Power: the consultant for the Works which arranged an RI to conduct inspection and supervise the works;

(ii) PC&E: the main contractor for the Works;

(iii) ISS: WF Court's PMC;

(iv) Victory Fire: the RFSIC engaged by ISS for the FSI annual inspection and related works at WF Court; and

(v) China Status Development and Engineering Co. Ltd ("China Status"): the RFSIC engaged by PC&E to issue shutdown notices ("SDNs") for the FSIs during the Works at WF Court.

134. Under the statutory regime which will be further discussed in Chapter 9, a prescribed inspection under the MBIS must be carried out by an RI, an individual, not a firm, whose name appears on the register of inspectors kept by the Building Authority ("BA") under Section 3 of the BO. Further, under Section 30D, any prescribed repair must be carried out by a Registered Contractor ("RC") under the supervision of an RI. The RI on record in relation to the Works at WF Court differed at each stage:

(i) During the prescribed inspection: Mr Shum Kui Chung, who was a shareholder and director of Will Power until he passed away on 15 July 2022.

(ii) During the prescribed repair works: Mr Ng Yeuk Wilson ("Mr Wilson Ng"), who became a shareholder and director of Will Power on 12 December 2023.

135. Key personnel associated with the abovementioned companies are set out in the table below:

Table 4-1: Key personnel in the Works and their respective roles

Will Power – Consultant	
Jason Wong	Director and shareholder
Wilson Ng	Director and RI since 12 December 2023 and 10 October 2024 respectively, responsible for the supervision of prescribed repair works at WF Court
Hung Sai Kit	Assistant Project Manager who prepared tender analysis
Choi Kwok Hing Steven ("Steven Choi")	Engineering Manager who attended inspections of scaffolding nets
Yeung Tsz Man	Engineering Manager / Works Supervisor, subordinate of Steven Choi, who attended inspections of scaffolding nets
Shum Kui Chung	Former director and RI until his death on 15 July 2022, responsible for the prescribed inspections at WF Court
Hung Kwok Wai	Middleman who introduced Wilson Ng to Jason Wong and offered Wilson Ng remuneration for acting nominally as an RI

PC&E – Main Contractor	
Hau Wa Kin	Director and principal shareholder
Cheung Yin Kam	Wife of Hau Wa Kin and clerical officer
Gordon Ho	Project Manager since 2008 and director until 13 January 2026
Wong Chung Kee Steve	Authorised Signatory ("AS"); also employed by a professional services provider separately and seconded to the Housing Department ("HD")'s Kowloon East regional office to work on building maintenance works
Tam Chun Son Sam ("Sam Tam")	Foreman for the Works at WF Court
Cheung Yiu Wing Jason	Foreman for the Works at WF Court
Chong Po Chung Mansfield	Foreman for the Works at WF Court, responsible for client complaints and handled FSI forms
Leung Lai Sze	Site clerical staff for the Works at WF Court
Wong Siu Tai Arthur ("Mr Arthur Wong")	Site safety supervisor for the Works at WF Court since September 2024, employed by Excel Target International Limited (which was engaged by PC&E)
Wong Pik Yi Karen	Clerical staff responsible for tenders
Yip Kwan Nga Sophie	Clerical staff for preparing reports

ISS – PMC	
Lai Wing Lee	Property Manager
Cheng Tsz Ying (witness no 32)	Property Officer since August 2014
Lam Sai Man	Assistant Building Supervisor from August 2025 to June 2026
Lam Man Yan (witness no 31)	Technical Officer (save for 2 April 2025 to 7 October 2025)
Law Kwok Shui (witness no 29)	Works technician who was a licensed electrician
Lee Shing Foo (witness no 28)	Works technician who was a carpenter
Chung Sui Ha (witness no 27)	Day shift building attendant at Wang Cheong House (Block F)
Wong Pak Shing (witness no 30)	Senior building attendant
Lok Sin Ying (witness no 26)	Clerk for the Works at WF Court

Victory Fire – RFSIC	
Chung Kit Man (witness no 24)	Director and Engineer
Wong Kin Wa (witness no 23)	Electrician who carried out annual inspection of FSIs at WF Court in March 2025, and conducted repair works to FSIs on 19 November 2025
Li Chun Yin (witness no 25)	Electrician who carried out annual inspection of FSIs at WF Court in March 2025, and conducted repair works to FSIs on 19 and 21 November 2025
Tong Hing Lun (witness no 33)	Plumber who conducted repair works to FSIs at WF Court on 16 and 17 October 2025

China Status – RFSIC	
Leung Ping Kay (witness no 34)	Director, contact person in relation to the Works at WF Court who signed SDNs
Yim Choi Wah Alex ("Alex Yim")	Director who signed FS251 certificates and some SDNs for the Works at WF Court

136. PC&E engaged a chain of subcontractors and sub-subcontractors. Their roles and representatives are set out in the table below:

Table 4-2: Subcontractors and Sub-subcontractors in the Works

Subcontractors of PC&E – Companies	
Gain Profit Shed Industry Ltd ("Gain Profit")	Subcontractor responsible for erecting the scaffolding
New Nam Fong Construction Ltd ("New Nam Fong")	Subcontractor responsible for works on external walls for Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H)
Hoi Tak Construction Engineering Ltd ("Hoi Tak")	Subcontractor responsible for works on external walls for Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Cheong House (Block F). Controlled by Yin Chor Ki Jacky ("Jacky Yin") (who also controls Hang Fung Building Engineering Ltd ("Hang Fung"), see Table 4-3 below)
Shing Construction Co., Ltd ("Shing Construction")	Subcontractor responsible for works on external walls for Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Tao House (Block B)
Fred & Willie Bros Const & Eng Co ("Fred & Willie")	Subcontractor responsible for the removal of existing cladding of external walls and clearance of construction debris

Subcontractors of PC&E – Companies	
Tin Hung Engineering Co. ("Tin Hung")	Subcontractor responsible for internal structural works, plastering works, paint works and water tanks works at Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Cheong House (Block F), Wang Shing House (Block G), and Wang Chi House (Block H)
Red Sun Construct (Asia) Engineering Ltd ("Red Sun")	Subcontractor responsible for internal structural works, plastering works, paint works and water tanks works at Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D), and Wang Tai House (Block E)
Wealth Pinnacle Ltd ("Wealth Pinnacle")	Subcontractor responsible for the replacement of windows, including the replacement of staircase windows with fire-rated windows

Subcontractors – Individuals/representatives	
Gain Profit	
Chan Yiu Fai	Operator
Zhong Fengping	Nominal director and shareholder, wife of Chan Yiu Fai
Yeung Chi Tim Andy	Independent sub-subcontractor for the scaffolding works
New Nam Fong	
Lo Ka Ming	Director, son of Lo Ping Nam
Lo Ping Nam	Director, father of Lo Ka Ming
Hoi Tak	
Cheung Wai Hung	Director, relative of Jacky Yin
Jacky Yin	Controller and operator of Hoi Tak and Hang Fung
Shing Construction	
Yiu Kam Fai	Operator
Fred & Willie	
Tsang Wai Kit	Director / Architect
Red Sun	
Wu Rizhao	Operator

Sub-subcontractors – Individuals	
Wong Luen Kuen (Operating under Kuen Shing Construction Ltd)	Sub-subcontractor engaged by Shing Construction to work on Wang Yan House (Block A)
Zhang Minghai (Operating under "明旺維修工程公司") (witness no 47)	Sub-subcontractor engaged by Shing Construction to work on Wang Tao House (Block B)
Wang Wa Tim (Operating under "王華添工程公司")	Sub-subcontractor engaged by New Nam Fong to work on Wang Sun House (half of Block C) and Wang Shing House (Block G)
Wong Chi Yam (Operating under On Cheong Engineering Ltd)	Sub-subcontractor engaged by New Nam Fong to work on Wang Sun House (half of Block C) and Wang Chi House (Block H)
Ng Pui Kwan (Operating under "港鵬工程公司") (witness no 46)	Sub-subcontractor engaged by Hoi Tak to work on Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Cheong House (Block F)

Sub-subcontractors – Companies engaged in staircase minor works ("MW")	
Allied Architects Engineers & Associates Ltd ("Allied Architects")	Sub-subcontractor engaged by Wealth Pinnacle to provide services in relation to the staircase window replacement works
Motive Design Limited ("Motive Design")	Registered Minor Works Contractor ("RMWC") engaged by Lai Ka Wing to submit MW submissions and site supervision plans ("SPs") for the staircase window replacement MW in Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Tao House (Block B)
Chi Fu Construction Co. ("Chi Fu Construction")	Registered General Building Contractor ("RGBC") engaged by Wealth Pinnacle to submit MW submissions and site SPs for the staircase window replacement MW in Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E), Wang Cheong House (Block F), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H)

Building professionals engaged in the staircase MW	
Lai Ka Wing Eric ("Eric Lai")	Authorised Person ("AP") engaged by Allied Architects to supervise the staircase window replacement MW in all eight blocks
Chi Wuh Jian Joseph Duncan ("Joseph Chi")	Registered Structural Engineer ("RSE") engaged by Allied Architects to act as a structural consultant for the staircase window replacement MW in all eight blocks

137. The subcontractors acquired scaffolding nets, foam boards (the term "foam board" will generally be used to describe polystyrene foam boards in this Report) and other construction materials from various suppliers, including the following:

Table 4-3: Suppliers of materials in the Works

Suppliers – Companies	
Lam Kee Construction Materials ("Lam Kee")	Supplier of scaffolding nets to Gain Profit
Shandong Chenxu Chemical Fiber Rope Net Co., Ltd. ("Shandong Chenxu") (English translation) 山東宸旭化纖繩網有限公司	Supplier of scaffolding nets to Gain Profit
Binzhou Yuanjin Chemical Fiber Rope Net Co., Ltd. ("Binzhou Yuanjin") (English translation) 濱州市源進化纖繩網有限公司	Supplier of scaffolding nets to Gain Profit
Hang Fung Building Engineering Ltd ("Hang Fung")	Company controlled by Jacky Yin, on-sold foam boards to New Nam Fong
Wuhan Hansu New Materials Co., Ltd. ("Wuhan Hansu") (English translation) 武漢漢塑新材料有限公司	Supplier of foam boards to Shing Construction
Hubei Yubo Energy-Saving New Materials Co., Ltd. ("Hubei Yubo") (English translation) 湖北宇博節能新材料有限公司	Supplier of foam boards to Hoi Tak

Suppliers – Individuals	
Wong Chi Ming	Nephew of Yiu Kam Fai of Shing Construction who introduced him to Wuhan Hansu (see above) as foam board supplier

138. In this Report, the former MC under the chairmanship of Mr Tang Kwok Kuen will be referred to as the "Former MC", and the new MC under the chairmanship of Mr Tsui Moon Come Tony ("Tony Tsui") (witness no 50) will be referred to as the "New MC". During the tender and construction stages of the Works, the following members of the MC of the IO of WF Court played a key role:

(i) The Chairman of the Former MC was Mr Tang Kwok Kuen, who had been a member of the MC since 1997 and held office as Chairman since 2012 before vacating both roles in September 2024.

(ii) Mr Tony Tsui succeeded Mr Tang Kwok Kuen and acted as the Chairman of the New MC from September 2024 to 6 January 2026.

(iii) Mr Kong Cheung Fat (witness no 51) served as a member of the MC between 25 May 2024 and 6 January 2026 under the chairmanship of both Mr Tang Kwok Kuen and Mr Tony Tsui. He was present at most of the key IO meetings.

139. The MC of the IO of WF Court has since been dissolved and an administrator (Hop On Management Company Ltd ("Hop On")) was appointed by the Lands Tribunal on 6 January 2026.

140. Finally, various Government departments and statutory bodies were involved in the tender and renovation stages of the Works at WF Court, several of which received numerous complaints from residents of the estate. Their roles in the various regulatory regimes and their responsibilities in respect of the present tragic incident will be examined in greater detail in Chapters 9, 11 and 14. For present purposes, it suffices to note the following:

(i) The Urban Renewal Authority ("URA") facilitated the IO's selection of the main contractor under the Smart Tender Building Rehabilitation Facilitating Services Scheme ("Smart Tender Scheme"). The URA engaged RS Surveyors Ltd ("RS Surveyors") to act as an independent advisor to the IO in relation to the RC tender process.

(ii) The ICU[16] issued the SNs for the inspection and repairs under the MBIS, received the submissions for MW (including the alterations to staircase windows) and attended the site in response to complaints.

(iii) The LD and the FSD likewise attended the site to follow up on complaints regarding the Works at WF Court.

(iv) The Home Affairs Department ("HAD") assisted the IO on matters relating to building management, attended owners' meetings and received complaints from residents.

16 The ICU is established under the Office of the Permanent Secretary for Housing, and is delegated authority by the BA for maintaining regulatory control in respect of buildings that were developed by the HA but sold to individual owners or divested.

141. The officials and staff from the Government and statutory bodies with direct involvement in the matters related to the Works at WF Court prior to the fire were as follows:

Table 4-4: Officials and staff from the Government and statutory bodies involved in the Works and associated complaints

URA	
Chan Yat Ho Matthew ("Matthew Chan") (witness no 67)	Case Manager (Building Rehabilitation) assigned to handle the WF Court file under the Smart Tender Scheme and prepared tender price summaries
Yam Lap Yin Brian ("Brian Yam") (witness no 68)	Assistant Manager who attended IO meetings and dealt with the owners' enquiries

ICU	
Ku Siu Ping (witness no 70)	Senior Maintenance Surveyor and Head of the MBIS Team, conducted site inspections in response to complaints by WF Court residents
Yung Siu Lun (witness no 71)	Senior Maintenance Surveyor and Head of the Minor Works Team ("MW Team"), reviewed MW submissions for staircase window alterations in WF Court
Tse Kam Ming (witness no 64)	Former Senior Building Surveyor (Building Control) seconded from the BD, was allegedly consulted by Ku Siu Ping on the use of foam boards to cover windows in WF Court
Lau Ka Man Amanda ("Amanda Lau")	Maintenance Surveyor, responded to complaints by residents under Ku Siu Ping's supervision, attended site inspections alongside Ku Siu Ping and Lee Ka Ho, Assistant Clerk of Works

LD	
Lam Sau Ching (witness no 52)	Divisional Occupational Safety Officer (Minor Renovation and Maintenance Works) responsible for WF Court throughout the Works at WF Court, supervised Occupational Safety Officers who inspected the site, and handled complaints to the LD

FSD	
Hor Herman (witness no 56)	Former Station Commander of Tai Po Fire Station, supervised the handling of enquiries concerning fire safety at WF Court
Ng Wing Kwong (witness no 57)	Senior Station Officer ("SStnO") of Tai Po Fire Station, handled an enquiry about the flammability of foam boards used at WF Court
Hui Kin On (witness no 36) ("SStn O Hui")	SStnO of Tai Po Fire Station, handled a complaint about workers smoking in WF Court, subsequently assumed the role of the initial Incident Commander of the fire in WF Court

HAD	
Or Wai Yin (witness no 65)	Liaison Officer of Tai Po District Office of the HAD, attended owners' meetings at WF Court and received complaints

B. TENDER PROCESS FOR THE WORKS AT WF COURT

B1. Overview of tender process and roles of the URA and RS Surveyors

142. Following the ICU's issuance of the SNs under the MBIS on 10 June 2016,[17] the IO applied to join the Smart Tender Scheme operated by the URA on 2 February 2018. The Smart Tender Scheme provides services that are designed to reduce the exposure of building owners to bid-rigging. As part of the services provided, the URA would assign and liaise with an Independent Consultant to advise the IO, review the RI's survey report, tender documents and cost estimates and attend IO meetings where necessary.

143. The URA assigned RS Surveyors as the Independent Consultant to advise the IO.[18] RS Surveyors confirmed to the URA that it had no conflict of interest in acting for WF Court.

144. By a tripartite agreement dated 16 June 2018, executed by the IO, RS Surveyors and the URA:

(i) RS Surveyors had to conduct a site survey and prepare an Initial Assessment Report identifying the MBIS works that were required, alongside a cost estimate for the same.

17 The IO made 13 applications to extend time for compliance with the SNs.

18 The URA had a panel of three consultants (namely Multiple Surveyors Limited, RS Surveyors and KC Surveyors Limited), which the URA assigned to act as Independent Consultant on a rotational basis.

(ii) Based on the draft tender documents produced by the RI, RS Surveyors had to prepare a Pre-tender Assessment Report ("PAR") and an Independent Cost Estimate, which would remain sealed until the tenders were opened.

(iii) After the opening of the tenders, RS Surveyors had to comment on the Tender Analysis Report ("TAR") produced by the RI.

145. On 9 August 2018, RS Surveyors produced its Initial Assessment Report of the MBIS repair works that were required. The basic repair costs were estimated at HK$102,077,704.[19]

146. However, for the reasons as further discussed in Chapter 14 of this Report, the URA and RS Surveyors had limited involvement in the tender processes for the selection of the RI and consultant for the Works at WF Court.

B2. Appointment of the RI for the purpose of the MBIS inspection

147. On 3 September 2018, the IO put out an open tender for the appointment of the RI for the purposes of carrying out the inspection of buildings under the MBIS. The URA posted the tender notice on the URA's Building Rehabilitation Platform website. The tender period was from 3 to 26 September 2018.

19 Although the Initial Assessment Report was dated 9 August 2018, the URA's receipt stamp indicated the finalised report was not received by the URA until 18 January 2019.

148. According to Madam Cheng Tsz Ying of ISS, Mr Cheng Yat Kai, an employee from the engineering department of ISS's headquarters, assisted the IO with the preparation of standard form tender documents for the selection of the RI. Madam Cheng and her subordinates were responsible for administrative work, including preparing documents (other than the tender documents), attending to registration at meetings, collecting and processing proxy votes, and writing meeting minutes.

149. According to the tender price summary prepared by the URA, there were 24 bids received ranging from HK$88,000 to HK$1,080,000. The average bid was around HK$500,000.

150. As part of the tender submission requirements, on 22 September 2018, Will Power and its RI, Mr Shum Kui Chung, signed a Declaration of Ethical Commitment Requirements and an Integrity and Anti-Collusion Clauses Confirmation. Will Power further signed an Anti-Collusive Tender Confirmation on the same date.

151. On 25 January 2019, WF Court's owners voted to appoint Will Power to carry out the prescribed inspection under the MBIS. Will Power received 67.5% of the votes, with the next-most-voted company only receiving 7.7%.[20]

152. The final bid price of Will Power was HK$222,000, discounted from the original bid price of HK$240,000. Will Power gave its discount by a letter dated 22 September 2018, without any request by the IO. The discount was described as a measure implemented after taking into account Will Power's operational situation and in discharge of its social responsibility to reduce the residents' expenditure.

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20 Will Power's bid price was in fact higher than that of next-most-voted company (HK$188,000).

153. Will Power proceeded with the inspection at WF Court. Following the inspection, Will Power issued the inspection reports. Some inspection reports were dated 3 April 2019, others were dated 30 July 2019, and one inspection report was undated.[21] Each of the inspection reports was signed by Mr Shum Kui Chung as the RI.

154. On 9 December 2019, Mr Shum Kui Chung (as the appointed RI) submitted the inspection reports and the Certificate of Building Inspection (applicable where prescribed repair is required after inspection) (hereafter referred as "Forms MBI 3") to the ICU, officially reporting that the buildings required repair.

B3. Appointment of the RI for the purpose of supervision of works

155. On 2 January 2020, the IO advertised a tender notice for the appointment of a consultant to design, plan and supervise the works. The URA provided limited assistance by posting the tender notice on its website.

156. According to the tender price summary prepared by the URA, the IO received 35 bids ranging from HK$45,000 to HK$2,080,000. Will Power's bid was the eleventh lowest, at HK$308,000. The average bid was around HK$550,000.

157. The breakdown for Will Power's tender price was as follows:

(i) Of the total tender price of HK$308,000, HK$60,000 was allocated for the works other than mandatory repairs under the MBIS.

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21 The inspection report for Wang Shing House (Block G) was undated. An earlier version of the Block G inspection report was dated 30 July 2019.

(ii) The remaining amount of HK$248,000 allocated for mandatory repair works comprised: (a) HK$28,000 for 15 days of work in initial planning; (b) HK$40,000 for 23 days in drafting the tender document for the tender for the main contractor; (c) HK$32,000 for 19 days in tender analysis and advice; (d) HK$20,000 for 9 days in drafting the repair works contract; (e) HK$100,000 for 68 days in inspecting and supervising the works; and (f) HK$28,000 for 15 days of follow-up work.

158. Will Power therefore proposed fees in the sum of HK$248,000 for a total of 149 days of mandatory repair works under the MBIS, or HK$1,664 a day. Will Power stated in its tender that the RI would personally carry out a total of 46 days of work relating to the MBIS repairs.

159. As part of the tender process for the consultancy appointment, on 15 January 2020, Will Power signed a further Declaration of Ethical Commitment Requirements and Anti-Collusive Tender Confirmation.[22]

160. By a letter dated 28 February 2020 to the IO, Will Power explained that, since it had been involved in the MBIS inspection, it was familiar with the site of WF Court and was therefore able to charge a relatively low fee.

161. Between 11 and 13 May 2020, the IO interviewed 14 of the tendering consultants. The URA did not participate in any of the interviews.

22 Neither document was signed by Mr Shum Kui Chung or any other RI.

162. At an Extraordinary General Meeting ("EGM") held on 11 December 2021, the owners voted to appoint Will Power as the consultant to supervise the repair works by a majority of 56.69% of votes. The consultancy contract was signed by Will Power and the IO on 22 December 2021.

B4. Appointment of the main contractor

163. The tendering process for the appointment of the main contractor then followed. Unlike the process of selecting the consultant, the tendering process for the main contractor was conducted under the URA's Smart Tender Scheme. During this process:

(i) As the works consultant, Will Power was responsible for drafting the tender document and rules of tender and evaluating the bids of the tendering contractors. Residents relied on Will Power for its professional advice.

(ii) Under the Smart Tender Scheme, the URA would provide, *inter alia*, an electronic tendering platform ("E-Platform") for the issuance of tender documents and the receipt of tenders. RS Surveyors also would advise the IO on the draft tender documents and to comment on Will Power's tender analysis after the tenders were opened.

164. Will Power submitted the first draft of the tender document to the URA on 23 August 2022. On 29 September 2022, the URA received from Will Power a Works Cost Estimate Report, which bore the signature of Mr Shum Kui Chung. These documents were passed to RS Surveyors.

165. Will Power's RI, Mr Shum Kui Chung, passed away on 15 July 2022. Nevertheless, the URA and RS Surveyors were not aware of Mr Shum's death when they received the Works Cost Estimate Report purportedly signed by him.

166. On 15 November 2022, RS Surveyors submitted its PAR (Part 1) to the URA. The report served two functions: (i) to review Will Power's draft tender document for discrepancies, omissions, or technical deficiencies, in particular, whether repair works that were mandatory under the MBIS had been omitted from the scope of works in the tender document; and (ii) to compare RS Surveyors' own Independent Cost Estimate against Will Power's cost estimate, flagging items with a variance of 30% or more. The following points about the report are noted:

(i) The URA's evidence is that RS Surveyors did not assess whether the draft tender document included in its scope any works that were superfluous. It follows that RS Surveyors did not advise the IO whether Will Power might have deliberately expanded the scope of works for the purpose of inflating the contract price.

(ii) RS Surveyors' assessment was based on visual inspection only「目視」勘察), without any testing or laboratory analysis, and did not cover concealed or inaccessible locations.

(iii) Paragraph 4 of the PAR (Part 1) provided RS Surveyors' cost assessment of HK$224,916,383. This was more than double its initial estimate of HK$102,077,704 as stated in its Initial Assessment Report. RS Surveyors explained this increase on the basis that Will Power's tender documents

proposed different and additional repair items to those assumed in RS Surveyors' Initial Assessment Report.

167. On 25 November 2022, RS Surveyors provided the PAR (Part 1) to the IO, except for paragraph 4 of the report which contained RS Surveyors' Independent Cost Estimate. This paragraph was withheld from the IO, Will Power, and all potential contractors to prevent bid-rigging.

168. On 30 December 2022, after considering the PAR1 (Part 1), Will Power submitted a revised draft tender document to the IO and the URA.

169. According to WF Court's former MC, from 19 January 2023, hard copies of the tender documents and the URA's assessment report (which is understood to be the PAR (Part 1)) were placed in the lobby of each of the eight blocks of WF Court.

170. At the EGM on 4 March 2023, the tender documents were confirmed by the owners of WF Court, subject to a final review by the URA and RS Surveyors.

171. In the meantime, Will Power proposed to the IO and the URA its tender scoring criteria for the purpose of the subsequent tender analysis stage:

(i) The proposed scoring criteria for the "company background" of tendering contractors included but were not limited to scores relating to: (a) availability of licences, ISO certification, financial statements and fund proof; (b) experience in large contract works; (c) solicitor's

confirmation of no litigation in the past two years; and (d) litigation record in the past eight years.

(ii) By an email on 15 March 2023, Mr Brian Yam of the URA provided his comments on the wording of the scoring criteria proposed by Will Power. Mr Matthew Chan, also of the URA, testified that these comments were the product of his discussions with Mr Yam, and were based on the wording and timeframes of the scoring criteria only. He confirmed that the URA would not comment on whether scoring criteria were effective, reasonable or consistent with usual practice. In fact, the URA would not comment even if a scoring criterion was wholly unreasonable.

172. On 17 March 2023, the Former MC of the IO convened to discuss and approve the tender scoring criteria as proposed by Will Power. The meeting minutes recorded that the URA had been consulted and had no comments on the overall scoring framework.

173. The final tender document and the endorsed tender scoring criteria were submitted to the URA on 27 March 2023.

(i) In the tender document, one of the most significant aspects of the works involved "External wall mosaic tile redecoration works". The tender was offered on the basis of three alternative options for this part of the works:

(a) Option 1: Repair of mosaic tiles and application of transparent protective coating

(b) Option 2: Repair of mosaic tiles and application of coloured coating

(c) Option 3: Complete re-rendering of plastering and re-tiling of mosaic tiles on the external walls

(ii) Tenderers were further put to a choice between use of "AKA" or "SKK" brand materials for the carrying out of each option.

174. On 19 April 2023, RS Surveyors issued PAR (Part 2), confirming that the tender documents conformed with the URA's requirements under the Integrated Building Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme, and enclosed an Independent Cost Estimate based on the finalised tender document. In the Independent Cost Estimate:

(i) RS Surveyors assessed the costs of the Works at WF Court depending on which of the three options was chosen for the external wall works. If Option 1 were adopted, the total project cost was estimated at approximately HK$144 million. If Option 3 were adopted, the total project cost was estimated at approximately HK$360 million.

(ii) The Independent Cost Estimate contained caveats, including that RS Surveyors' cost estimates could not be fully relied upon and were for general reference only.

175. The Independent Cost Estimate of RS Surveyors was placed in a sealed envelope and deposited into the URA's tender box on 4 July 2023, to be unsealed after the opening of the tenders.

176. On 16 May 2023, the URA advertised the tender notice for the works contract on the electronic Smart Tender platform and sent a tender notice to all contractors registered at the electronic platform. Ultimately, 99 contractors downloaded the tender document.

177. The bids (together with RS Surveyors' Independent Cost Estimate) were opened on 5 July 2023, overseen by URA officers and an independent certified public accountant. A total of 57 contractors submitted bids for the project. The bids were handed over to Will Power for its tender analysis.

178. On 18 September 2023, Will Power submitted its first draft TAR by applying the tender scoring criteria approved by the IO on 17 March 2023. It was purportedly signed by Mr Wilson Ng, who later became the only RI of Will Power. Companies Registry records however show that Mr Ng only joined Will Power as a shareholder and director on 12 December 2023.[23]

179. According to the URA's evidence, the URA did not check whether the tenderers were inter-related, and it did not investigate whether the TAR contained misleading information, including in relation to the litigation records. It relied on Will Power to deal with these matters.

180. On 14 and 16 October 2023, the MC and Will Power conducted interviews with 14 shortlisted contractors. The URA did not attend any of these interviews, but accepted that the interviews were an important part of the tendering process.

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23 Mr Wilson Ng's WhatsApp message suggesting that he became a shareholder and director of Will Power since 9 March 2023. However, this was not corroborated with the official record of the Companies Registry.

181. On 27 November 2023, RS Surveyors prepared an assessment report regarding the contents of Will Power's draft TAR, and the same was sent to the IO on 4 December 2023 for its reference.

(i) The assessment report prepared by RS Surveyors was only a few pages in length and, apart from identifying items in one of the tenders that deviated significantly from the Independent Cost Estimate, it focused on calculation errors and typographical errors in Will Power's draft TAR.

(ii) The assessment report did not address issues that may assist owners in preventing bid-rigging.

182. On 11 December 2023, Will Power submitted a revised TAR, taking into account the observations in RS Surveyors' assessment report.

(i) Publicly available Companies Registry records indicate that PC&E's Mr Hau Wa Kin was associated with at least five other tendering companies. The TAR did not disclose any of these relationships, despite Will Power purporting to disclose that other tenderers were suspected of bid-rigging or collusion.

(ii) In the "company background" section, PC&E was the highest-scoring bidder and the only tenderer to be awarded a Grade B rating. The Grade B rating reflected PC&E's score of a total of 20 marks, which included the maximum six marks in total allocated for the scoring criteria of "no litigation in the past two years" and "litigation record in the past eight years".

(iii) According to the criterion of "no litigation in the past two years", three marks were awarded if a tenderer submitted a certificate from a practising lawyer stating it had no litigation in the past two years. PC&E submitted a letter from a firm of solicitors, Messrs Pansy Leung Tang & Chua, which confirmed that PC&E had "*no record of having been sued by owners' corporation and management company in the past seven years*." This confirmation was narrowly framed. It plainly did not cover criminal prosecutions, disciplinary actions or litigation brought by other types of plaintiffs.

(iv) The TAR failed to disclose that, in August 2023, PC&E was disciplined by the Registered Contractors' Disciplinary Board as published on the website of the BD and in the Government Gazette. It also failed to disclose that PC&E had been prosecuted 112 times and convicted 98 times for offences under occupational safety and health legislation from 2001 to 2023.

183. According to a chronology of the tender process prepared by the Former MC of WF Court, a series of steps was taken by the IO to inform owners of the tenders:

(i) Will Power held consultation sessions on 2 and 6 October 2023, at which the TAR and the works were explained. Madam Or Wai Yin of the HAD confirmed her understanding from the HAD's records that consultation sessions had been held before the EGM.

(ii) On 19 December 2023, a summary of the contractor tender prices ("Contractor Tender Pricing Summary") was distributed to the mailbox of each household. It recorded

that, according to Will Power's scoring, PC&E was the highest-ranking bidder for the background criteria.

(iii) A further owners' briefing was held on 6 January 2024. The tender information of all 57 contractors was displayed in the meeting room of the IO from 15 to 17 January 2024. On 18 January 2024, Will Power representatives answered owners' queries.

184. Despite these measures, the evidence of residents suggests that owners were not fully aware of material information about the tenders. Mr Yip Ka Kui Sdanni ("Mr Sdanni Yip") (witness no 16) testified that, before the EGM, he did not know the tender prices and did not recall receiving the Contractor Tender Pricing Summary, although he accepted that the tender information of all 57 contractors might have been displayed in the IO's meeting room from 15 to 17 January 2024.

B5. EGM on 28 January 2024

185. On 28 January 2024, the MC held an EGM to officially vote on the three external wall repair options and the main contractor for the works.

186. According to the HAD's report of the EGM:

(i) The EGM took place at the estate's basketball court. At 14:00 hours, the master of ceremonies announced the commencement of the EGM, noting that 293 owners were in attendance and the quorum was met. He stated that due to tight time constraints, there would be no question-and-

answer session, in respect of which some owners in attendance expressed their dissatisfaction.

(ii) On that day, the Police Community Relations Officer and then Tai Po District Councillors Madam Wong Pik Kiu, Mr Mui Siu Fung, Mr Lo Hiu Fung and Mr Yu Chi Wing attended the EGM as observers upon the invitation of the MC. The District Councillors supervised the vote-counting process.

(iii) Will Power explained the Smart Tender process and the scoring mechanism to the owners, including the assessment of company background, tender pricing and interview scores. Notice boards inside the venue also displayed the Contractor Tender Pricing Summary.

187. The licensing status and disciplinary record of PC&E were matters of controversy prior to and during the EGM:

(i) On 23 January 2024, being five days before the EGM, Mr Lai Wing Lee of ISS emailed the URA noting that Mr Tang Kwok Kuen (Chairman of the MC at the time) discovered an online article which alleged that: (a) PC&E had been formally disciplined by the Registered Contractors' Disciplinary Board in August 2023; (b) PC&E's RC licence was due to expire on 8 March 2024; and (c) URA representative Mr Brian Yam had stated that if the contractor lost its licence before the contract was executed, the residents would need to recommence the tender process.

(ii) On the same day, Mr Brian Yam replied on behalf of the URA, suggesting Will Power should inform owners of the latest information pertaining to all of the contractors, including their licence details and shortcomings.

(iii) The minutes of the EGM recorded Will Power's explanation at the meeting. Will Power noted that the licence-expiry information for each tenderer had been set out in the TAR, the cut-off date of which was 4 July 2023. Upon a further review as at 23 January 2024, the licences of two bidders, Unitacs Engineering Company Ltd and Polyfair Construction & Engineering Ltd, no longer subsisted while nine had been renewed. Will Power advised that owners could freely vote for any company, except the two tenderers whose licences had lapsed.

(iv) According to the testimony of Mr Matthew Chan of the URA, during the EGM, Mr Jason Wong raised the matter of PC&E's licence status and provided an explanation. However, Mr Chan did not recall PC&E's litigation or disciplinary record being discussed. As the EGM permitted no questions, some dissatisfied residents were advised by security to leave. Mr Kong Cheung Fat also had no impression of PC&E's adverse litigation or disciplinary record being discussed at the EGM.

188. After the EGM, the complaints about PC&E continued:

(i) In one complaint by a resident, reference was made to PC&E's licensing status and disciplinary and litigation

record, and it was further alleged that PC&E was involved in the bid-rigging case of Garden Vista in Shatin.[24]

(ii) In another complaint, a member of the public noted from publicly available information that PC&E was prosecuted or disciplined more than 140 times. He alleged that Will Power and the IO failed to keep residents fully informed in the tender analysis process.[25]

189. Another matter of controversy concerning the EGM was the manner in which proxy votes were obtained.

(i) After the EGM, several complaints were made to the HAD by residents alleging that the EGM commenced with around 293 persons in attendance in person or by proxy, but around 570 votes were later counted without explanation.[26]

(ii) Madam Cheng Tsz Ying of ISS responded to this allegation, explaining that when an owner arrived to collect their ballot, it came with an attendance slip. Staff would accumulate a batch of slips before passing them to the counting company to conduct computerised counting, which might have given owners the mistaken impression that the recorded vote total had suddenly surged.

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24 Complaint sent to the BD by email on 21 February 2024 (Ref No 4 in the BD list at Annex 8).

25 Complaint sent to departments including the BD and the HAD on 17 March 2024 (Ref No 10 in the BD list and Ref No 5 in the HAD list at Annex 8).

26 Complaints sent to the HAD on 9 February and 5 April 2024 (Ref nos 1 and 8 in the HAD list at Annex 8).

(iii) According to a complaint by a member of the public, residents who did not appoint any proxies reportedly saw their units listed as having appointed proxies.[27] Mr Kong Cheung Fat also recalled an incident where an owner's voting ballot had been taken by another person, but it subsequently transpired that the owner's mother had signed the proxy vote in question.

(iv) No owner has given first-hand evidence to the Committee that his or her signature on a proxy vote had been forged, or that a proxy vote had been used without authority. Mr Kong Cheung Fat accepted that, although allegations of fake proxy votes had been made, no substantive evidence was found to prove them.

(v) The practice for collecting proxy votes was described by Mr Tony Tsui. In brief, proxy votes were deposited by owners into a collection box on an anonymous basis around 14 days before a meeting. Proxy votes were not signed in the presence of the IO or ISS, and no one verified the authenticity of the proxy votes or the signatures on them. ISS would issue a receipt to the mailbox of units which submitted proxy votes. At the meeting, owners and proxies produced identity cards and were checked against unit records before ballots were issued. A summary list of units that had lodged proxies was posted at the venue, showing the units that lodged proxies but not the identity of the proxy vote-holders.

27 Complaint sent to the HAD on 23 March 2024 (Ref No 6 in the HAD list at Annex 8).

(vi) Mr Tony Tsui confirmed that the practice for collecting proxy votes remained unchanged before and after his MC took office on 6 September 2024. Notably, despite the misgivings which Mr Kong Cheung Fat and other members of the new MC have expressed about the collection of proxy votes at previous meetings, they maintained the same mechanism after taking charge of the IO.

(vii) There were also allegations of District Councillors approaching and gathering proxy votes from residents under the guise of helping them apply for subsidies, as recorded in a complaint sent by Mr Tony Tsui to the HAD.[28] The involvement of Madam Wong Pik Kiu in gathering proxy votes for the meetings on 11 December 2021 and 6 September 2024 is not disputed, as she accepted in her written answers to the Committee.[29] This leaves open the question as to whether any proxy votes was obtained by deception or other improper means, but throughout the Evidential Hearing, no owner has given first-hand evidence to that effect.[30]

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28 Complaint by Mr Tony Tsui to the HAD on 3 September 2024 (Ref No 27 in the HAD list at Annex 8).

29 Madam Wong Pik Kiu's first written reply to the Inquiry Solicitors para 16.

30 The Committee noted that after the completion of Evidential Hearing, there were media reports alleging Madam Wong Pik Kiu or her associates having obtained proxy votes from owners who had already passed away at the time of the relevant owners' meetings, and the Police are said to have started its follow-up on the allegations according to the established practice.

190. Against that context, the following resolutions were recorded in the minutes of the EGM:

(i) By a majority of 80.5% votes, the owners approved Option 3, i.e. the complete re-rendering of plastering and re-tiling of mosaic tiles on the external walls.

(ii) By a majority of 76.82% votes, the owners resolved to replace existing windows of staircases with fire-rated windows.

(iii) By a majority of 54.79%, the owners resolved to appoint PC&E as the main contractor of the works at a contract sum of over HK$330 million.

B6. Replacement of the MC

191. Following the EGM in January 2024, there were several attempts by residents to call for meetings to nullify the resolution to appoint PC&E as the main contractor.

192. Between February and May 2024, residents requisitioned the then Chairman of the MC, Mr Tang Kwok Kuen, to convene an EGM. When Mr Tang failed to accede to their request, the residents made complaints to the HAD, which issued four advisory letters to Mr Tang advising him to convene the EGM within 14 days, as required by the Building Management Ordinance (Cap. 344) ("BMO"). The residents' requisition was subsequently withdrawn.

193. The contract for the prescribed repair works ("Works Contract") in respect of WF Court was executed on 16 April 2024 at a final contract sum of HK$336,616,277. The Works Contract was signed by Mr Tang Kwok Kuen on behalf of the IO, Mr Hau Wa Kin on behalf of PC&E and Mr Jason Wong on behalf of Will Power.

194. In June 2024, solicitors acting for the IO issued letters to the owners, demanding payment for the Works at WF Court in the sums of HK$156,602 (Flats 3 and 7), HK$169,654 (Flats 2, 4, 6 and 8) and HK$182,702 (Flats 1 and 5) in six instalments due within a period of seven months.

195. The tight payment schedule gave rise to significant concerns. On 18 June 2024, the Former MC extended the payment deadline from 15 February 2025 to 31 May 2025. Residents nonetheless pressed on, hoping to further extend the payment schedule. After television coverage of the dispute in an episode of "Scoop" on 7 July 2024, residents gathered at a nearby school park, formed a residents' monitoring group and began collecting the 5% of signatures required to requisition an EGM.

196. Mr Tang Kwok Kuen once again failed to accede to the requisition within the 14-day period required by law. Complaints were made to the HAD, which issued four advisory letters to Mr Tang. One of the letters noted that some residents planned to issue proceedings in the Lands Tribunal.

197. Eventually, an EGM took place on 6 September 2024. The owners resolved to remove the Former MC, and a New MC chaired by Mr Tony Tsui was elected. Mr Kong Cheung Fat was the only member of the former MC who remained on the New MC. The meeting turned contentious. At about 21:35 hours, the outgoing chairman Mr Tang Kwok Kuen announced that the venue hire had expired and the meeting had to be

adjourned, prompting protest from the owners present. With the assistance of the HAD, the venue agreed to extend the hire and the meeting eventually completed at 22:55 hours.

198. Mr Tony Tsui's evidence was that there was no handover of any kind from the Former MC. No documents had been passed over, and relations between the two committees remained poor. Nevertheless, the New MC moved quickly to establish a works sub-group to monitor the Works at WF Court. On 7 September 2024, they created a WhatsApp group with Will Power, PC&E and ISS. The New MC sought to improve transparency with residents, holding 44 meetings (including works meetings every Saturday) that were open to residents to attend.

199. The New MC inherited the Works Contract, which had already been executed. For this reason, Mr Tony Tsui believed it was impossible to remove PC&E and Will Power. While the New MC was dissatisfied with PC&E and Will Power, they had to rely on them to complete the Works.

200. Within those constraints, the New MC negotiated the reduction of certain items of works. On 13 November 2024, they discussed with PC&E and Will Power the reduction of individual items from the scope of the Works. The reduction of work items was ultimately put to the owners at an EGM on 21 March 2025.

201. Subject to these reductions, the Works Contract continued to provide the basis for the conduct of the Works at WF Court, which the following section addresses.

C. PROGRESS OF THE WORKS UP TO THE DAY OF THE FIRE

C1. Contracted works and duties of PC&E and Will Power

202. The Works Contract provides the starting point for understanding the scope of the Works and the duties of PC&E and Will Power.

203. The scope of the works was extensive, covering virtually all parts of the estate. The scope of works is summarised in broad terms in Part 2 of the Works Contract to include the following nine main items:

(i) setting up of the construction site and other preparatory works;

(ii) hacking-off of existing external wall plastering and renovation;[31]

(iii) repair and renovation of indoor common areas;

(iv) improvement works to FSIs (including the staircase windows and smoke doors on each floor);

(v) drainage pipes works;

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31 The scope of this work includes the common external and internal walls, corridors, external and internal staircases and decks, the China Light & Power substation, all common facilities rooms (including pump rooms and lift machine rooms), the exterior of the concrete water tanks, and the walls, ceilings, beams, joists, boundary walls, columns and structural elements of common facilities, etc.; but excludes the main rooftop, all concrete window hoods on the external walls, and the tops and interiors of the concrete water tanks.

(vi) miscellaneous works (including repairs to the water tanks);

(vii) air conditioning drainage pipes works;

(viii) repair of concrete window hoods on the external walls; and

(ix) repair of concrete slabs on the external walls that support air conditioners.

204. Crucially, PC&E owed an express duty to coordinate and strengthen fire prevention measures to protect the life and property of building owners, pursuant to the standard form of contract.

205. Relevant to the combustible materials found on the scaffolding is PC&E's duty under the conditions of tender in Part 4 of the Works Contract to clear away any rubbish and debris in a timely manner:

(i) It was agreed that no materials, waste or debris should be stored on the scaffolding (except for temporary use) and any materials, waste or debris stored temporarily on the scaffolding should be cleared before the end of each working day.

(ii) This duty is repeated in other terms of the Works Contract.

206. The particular specifications of the repair works and construction materials were set out in Part 6 of the Works Contract, with Part 7 containing the bill of quantities, a breakdown of the price with reference to each item of works. The following clauses are relevant to various aspects of the state of the Works on the day of the fire:

(i) The specifications required PC&E to source and supply a double-layered scaffolding net. In the event of a typhoon, PC&E was required to remove the nets and canvases from the scaffolding and to re-install them once the typhoon had passed. PC&E was responsible for all damage to scaffolding caused by typhoons, and associated repair costs were included in the tender price. The relevance of this will become clear later on, as the scaffolding nets at WF Court had been damaged by multiple typhoons.

(ii) The specifications also required PC&E to install temporary steel covered pedestrian walkways. These steel covered walkways had not been constructed by the time of the fire.[32]

(iii) In relation to the renovation of the external walls, PC&E was under a duty to implement adequate measures to protect the buildings and to supply sufficient protective boards.

(iv) In relation to the renovation of water tanks, the specifications in Clause 13 of Part 6 of the Works Contract provide that, unless otherwise specified, the renovation of water tanks shall include the Fire Services ("FS") tank, domestic water tank and flush water tank. Where necessary, PC&E was required to provide a temporary water tank of equivalent capacity to maintain supply of water while the relevant water tanks were being water-proofed and re-tiled, and on completion to re-connect the pipework to the renovated water tank and remove the temporary tank.

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32 The evidence indicates that the MC withheld payment because the steel covered walkways were not constructed.

207. Will Power, as the consultant, was under a duty to review and supervise the Works. The following provisions suggest that Will Power's role under the Works Contract was one of constant and close supervision:

(i) PC&E was to provide a written report of the progress of the works to Will Power every week to facilitate supervision of the works. Upon completion of a particular item of works, PC&E must obtain Will Power's approval of those works before proceeding to the next item of works. Further, the materials used for the Works must be first approved by Will Power.

(ii) Will Power had the power to request PC&E to cease employing any construction worker whose performance or conduct is unsatisfactory.

C2. The phasing of the works

208. Before its appointment as main contractor, PC&E issued a document dated 10 November 2023 answering questions raised by Will Power about the proposed works. PC&E proposed that the works would be conducted in two stages, with the completion of scaffolding in four blocks before erecting scaffolding in the remaining blocks.

209. Subsequently, the Works Contract set out a provisional plan, subject to the final decision by the IO, for the works to be carried out in three phases. Phase I would begin with the renovation of one block, phase II with the renovation of three blocks, and phase III with the renovation of the remaining four blocks. The works for each block would be completed within 360 working days.

210. The staged approach was discussed at a works meeting on 9 May 2024, attended by representatives of the Former MC, ISS, Will Power and PC&E. The works were proposed to be conducted in three rolling phases with a "3-3-2" split, with phase I involving Wang Cheong House (Block F), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H), phase II involving Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D) and Wang Tai House (Block E), and phase III involving Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Tao House (Block B).

211. The 3-3-2 rolling phased approach was approved at a subsequent works meeting on 30 May 2024. It was also unanimously agreed that the works would officially commence on 16 July 2024, with the preliminary works (such as the installation of a temporary office and toilet) commencing in mid-June 2024.

212. The progress reports prepared by PC&E from 15 August 2024 to 22 November 2025 provide a periodic record of how the three rolling phases of the works were carried out in practice. The progress reports were presented and discussed at the works progress meetings attended by PC&E, Will Power, ISS, the MC and residents.

213. As to the progress of the phase I works, namely, in Wang Cheong House (Block F), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H):

(i) The scaffolding for phase I began to be erected on 16 July 2024.

(ii) According to PC&E's progress report dated 17 September 2024, by that date the scaffolding had already been fully erected on the phase I blocks, with scaffolding nets fully installed.

(iii) The covering of windows with foam boards was regarded as protection works under item 1.8 of the bill of quantities. By a notice issued by PC&E on 23 August 2024, residents of Wang Cheong House (Block F) were informed that, from 30 August 2024 to 31 October 2024, works would be conducted to cover windows with protective foam boards and to saw-cut the window-side concrete.

(iv) The protection works, including the covering of windows with foam boards, were completed for the phase I units by the week of 9 November 2024.

214. As to the progress of the phase II works, namely, in Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D) and Wang Tai House (Block E):

(i) The scaffolding under phase II began to be erected on 25 September 2024 after completion of the erection of scaffolding in phase I. The erection of scaffolding for phase II was completed in the week of 2 November 2024, with scaffolding nets fully installed.

(ii) The protection works in phase II, including the covering of windows with foam boards, were completed by the week of 11 January 2025.

215. As to the progress of the phase III works, namely, in Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Tao House (Block B):

(i) The erection of the scaffolding commenced on 3 December 2024, and was completed in the week of 4 January 2025, with scaffolding nets fully installed.

(ii) The protection works, including the covering of windows with foam boards, were planned to be commenced from the week of 20 December 2024. The percentage completion of the protection works, as stated in subsequent progress reports, was unreliable.[33] The clear inference is that the phase III protection works had been completed by 8 March 2025, as they were no longer listed as works required to be conducted. Further, the windows would have to be covered by foam boards before the hacking-off works, which were well underway by 8 March 2025.

216. Therefore, the progress reports indicated that the scaffolding was erected in three sequential phases. However, the substantive works did not proceed one phase after another. Instead, the substantive works across the three phases overlapped and were carried out concurrently for almost a year until the day of the fire:

(i) The progress reports and the situation on site made clear that the substantive works in phases II and III commenced well before the substantive works in phase I had been completed. When the phase III scaffolding works commenced on 3 December 2024, the phase I hacking-off works were 95%

33 The progress of protection works remained at 30% as late as May 2025, which is contrary to the evidence and likely to be erroneous.

complete and the phase II hacking-off works were 25% complete, with most of the remaining works items yet to be commenced across all eight blocks.

(ii) Moreover, the final progress report dated 22 November 2025 indicated that phase I had yet to complete its rendering, tiling, and air-conditioning concrete hood works.

217. This meant that, for nearly a year until the day of the fire, WF Court's residents had been living their day-to-day lives within the confines of the scaffolding and behind windows covered by opaque foam boards that blocked light and the view outside. A resident, Madam Tse Yuk Wa (witness no 2), testified that she rarely opened her window once the foam boards had been installed, because looking out revealed only rubbish and debris, leaving the environment outside too poor to open the window at all.

218. Importantly, the concurrent enclosure of all eight blocks with combustible materials for a substantial period gave rise to obvious fire hazards.

219. Mr Tony Tsui's evidence was that, shortly after the appointment of the New MC in September 2024, it asked PC&E whether each phase could be completed before the next phase commenced. A reason for this request was a safety concern arising from the works being carried out concurrently across all eight blocks. PC&E declined on the basis of the resulting delay and additional bond and insurance costs, and the risk of losing its experienced scaffolding crew who might not be available in later phases. PC&E asserted that the Former MC had already given approval to the works proceeding together.

220. A related question is whether the foam boards could have been removed from the windows once the hacking-off works on the external walls were completed:

(i) The evidence is that the hacking-off works were completed in the week of 14 December 2024 for phase I, the week of 29 March 2025 for phase II and the week of 26 April 2025 for phase III.

(ii) Mr Zhang Minghai, a sub-subcontractor responsible for the hacking-off works in Wang Tao House (Block B), testified that he was instructed by Mr Yiu Kam Fai of Shing Construction not to remove the foam boards from the windows after the hacking-off works were completed.

(iii) Mr Tony Tsui testified that the foam boards were not removed after the hacking-off because they served to protect the windows from stone and debris dislodged by the remaining works (such as works on the air-conditioning platforms). He accepted, with hindsight, that the New MC had not explored carrying out the hacking-off one elevation (i.e. one face of the building) at a time and removing the foam boards when each elevation was completed.

C3. The works on the external wall

221. The works on the external wall were one of the most significant aspects of the renovation: the costs for these works amounted to HK$224,354,360, around two-thirds of the total contract price. These works were conducted by subcontractors engaged by PC&E.

222. The sequence of external wall works to be performed involved 12 steps that can be broadly categorised into three stages:

(i) the hacking-off and removal of original external wall tiling and removal of air conditioning units;

(ii) the repair of underlying concrete and rendering (including water-proofing); and

(iii) the retiling of external wall with new tiles, reinstallation of air conditioners, and washing of the finished wall surface.

223. The external wall works were intended to be carried out in rolling phases. Phase I was scheduled to begin on 8 October 2024, phase II on 18 December 2024, and phase III on 15 February 2025.

224. According to PC&E's progress reports, the works did not strictly adhere to this schedule. The actual progress of the external wall works was as follows.

225. As to the first stage, the hacking-off works:

(i) By 27 September 2024, phase I hacking-off of the old tiles was 11% completed.

(ii) By 7 December 2024, phase I hacking-off was 95% completed, with phase II hacking-off 25% completed.

(iii) By 21 February 2025, phase I hacking-off was 100% completed, with phase II 83% completed, and phase III 19% completed.

(iv) By 26 April 2025, the hacking-off works in all blocks had been 100% completed.

226. As to the next stage of external wall works, namely, the repair of underlying concrete, rendering and waterproofing:

(i) The underlying concrete would first be repaired (described by the progress reports initially as "*Hammer Tap & Concrete Repair*"), before waterproof rendering works were carried out.

(ii) By 7 December 2024, the hammer tap and concrete repair works in phase I were 40% completed.

(iii) By 4 January 2025, the hammer tap and concrete repair works for phase I were 100% completed, with waterproof rendering 22% completed. Hammer tap and concrete repair works for phase II were 20% completed.

(iv) The description of works changed in the work progress report on 21 February 2025. The item "*Hammer Tap & Concrete Repair*" was renamed as "*Ext Wall*". The completion percentage for this item remained at 100% for phase I and 20% for phase II. The "*Ext Wall*" work item included two sub-items, "*Ext Wall Concrete Repair*" and "*AC Hood Concrete Repair*". For the phase I blocks, the completion percentages were 70% for the former sub-item and 30% for the latter sub-item.

(v) Will Power subsequently reported that, following the hacking-off works, the window hoods were found to suffer from serious spalling and a shortage of steel reinforcement. An EGM was convened on 21 March 2025, at which the owners resolved by 92.26% votes to repair the hoods according to their existing condition and separately resolved by 89.45% votes to fund the rebuilding of severely dilapidated window hoods by a capped lump sum of HK$16.5 million.

(vi) During the works meeting on 29 March 2025, PC&E applied for an extension of the works period, so as to implement the owners' resolution to repair the window hoods.

(vii) The progress report of the same date (29 March 2025) recorded the waterproof rendering item as "-" across all phases. This reflected the need to complete the window hood repairs before rendering could continue.

(viii) By 12 April 2025, waterproof rendering was described at 3% for phase I, indicating that the rendering works had resumed. Waterproof rendering remained at 3% for phase I and "-" for phases II and III up to and including 9 May 2025.

(ix) The format of the progress reports changed from the progress report dated 24 May 2025 onwards. Under the new format, the percentage completion of works was no longer listed, and the items were described differently.[34] The progress of the

34 For example, (i) what had been separated into three items of "Ext Wall", "Ext Wall Concrete Repair" and "AC Hood Concrete Repair" appears to have merged into one single item of "Concrete Repair"; and (ii) what had been "Waterproof Render" appears to have been re-named as "Rendering" or "Levelling & Rendering".

works could still be ascertained from the table entitled "*Works to be Conducted in Upcoming 2-Weeks Period*".

(x) By 5 July 2025, concrete repair was no longer listed as a works item under "*Works to be Conducted in Upcoming 2-Weeks Period*" for any of the phases. It is to be inferred that the concrete repair process had been completed across all blocks. Meanwhile, rendering works continued for all three Phases.

(xi) The final progress report on 22 November 2025 continued to list "*Rendering*" as works to be conducted in all three phases in the upcoming two-week period. The report also included charts which listed the remaining rendering and tiling works on a unit-by-unit basis.

227. As to the final stage of the external wall works, namely, the re-tiling of mosaic tiles and stone-washing:

(i) By 9 May 2025, "*Tiling*" was listed under "*Works to be Conducted in Upcoming 2-Weeks Period*" for the first time for phase I. By 24 May 2025, tiling was also listed for phase II.

(ii) By 13 September 2025, the unit-by-unit progress charts recorded that tiling works had begun in the phase III blocks, whereas tiling works for phases I and II were continuing.

(iii) The final progress report recorded that tiling works were ongoing as at 21 November 2025. It is to be inferred that such works were continuing until the day of the fire.

(iv) Since tiling had been completed on the Flats 2-3 sides of the external wall of Wang Cheong House (Block F), stone-washing was underway on those sides until the day of the fire.[35] However, only a part of the external walls of Wang Cheong House had reached that final stage, and the tiling of the remaining external walls of other blocks had not been completed.

228. In summary, as at the date of the fire, the hacking-off works had been completed across all blocks, but the majority of blocks were undergoing rendering and tiling processes.

229. The following sub-sections will focus in greater detail on specific aspects of the works which concern fire safety.

C4. Use of scaffolding nets, plastic sheeting and toe boards

230. The scaffolding nets, plastic sheeting and toe boards were used at WF Court to prevent tools, materials and debris from falling off the scaffolding.

(I) Scaffolding nets: the documentary and witness evidence

231. The requirement that scaffolding nets be fire-retardant was discussed at a works meeting before the scaffolding was erected. In this context, fire retardancy refers to the property of a material that enables it to resist ignition and self-extinguish once the external heat source is removed, rather than sustaining and propagating the flame.

35 Evidence of Madam Huang Zulian (witness no 13).

(i) At the 30 May 2024 works meeting, PC&E informed the attendees that the scaffolding nets at external walls would be of fire-retardant quality.

(ii) In a works meeting on 17 June 2024, Will Power reminded PC&E to strictly adhere to the requirements of the BD's Practice Note for Authorized Persons, Registered Structural Engineers and Registered Geotechnical Engineers ("PNAP") APP-70 and submit the fire-retardancy certificate for the scaffolding nets. PC&E was also asked to conduct an on-site testing of the fire-retardancy of the scaffolding nets.

(iii) PNAP APP-70 issued by the BD in May 1995 stipulates that plastic sheeting covering scaffolding must be flame-retardant, and that obstruction to natural ventilation and lighting of occupied buildings should be avoided as far as practicable.[36]

232. Three days later, on 20 June 2024, PC&E entered into a sub-contract with Gain Profit by which scaffolding works at WF Court were sub-contracted to Gain Profit for a contract price of HK$3.15 million per block.

(i) The sub-contract required Gain Profit to comply with applicable laws and regulations regarding scaffolding nets.

(ii) The sub-contract enclosed Gain Profit's quotation dated 29 May 2024, which provided that Gain Profit was to install a dual-layered fire-retardant scaffolding net.

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36 The statutory regulations relating to the use of scaffolding nets will be further discussed in Chapter 9 of this Report.

(iii) Clause 12 of the terms and conditions further stipulates that Gain Profit is responsible for maintaining and repairing the scaffolding. It was agreed that, during typhoon seasons, Gain Profit must immediately adopt appropriate measures and follow-up on the state of the scaffolding and scaffolding nets. Such extra maintenance and repair costs were to be borne by Gain Profit who could not seek compensation from PC&E.

233. The person-in-charge at Gain Profit was Mr Chan Yiu Fai, who has provided a witness statement. Mr Chan accepted that the scaffolding nets used must be of a fire-retardant quality. His evidence is consistent with the quotation issued by Gain Profit on 29 May 2024, as mentioned above.[37]

234. In July 2024, Gain Profit purchased the first batch of scaffolding nets for the phase I blocks from Shandong Chenxu. Mr Chan Yiu Fai's evidence was that Gain Profit acquired 1,500 units of fire-retardant nets from Shandong Chenxu for the purposes of phase I of the works. Delivery of the scaffolding nets was recorded in a delivery note dated 17 July 2024.

235. According to a fire-retardancy certificate dated 8 January 2024, Shandong Chenxu submitted scaffolding nets for testing by the National Quality Supervision and Inspection Centre for Personal Protective Equipment (Beijing) (English translation) (國家勞動保護用品質量監督檢驗中心（北京）). The certificate stated that: (i) the fire-retardancy was tested according to the criteria in the national standard GB 5725-2009; (ii) the test result was that the scaffolding net was ignited for zero seconds in the after-flame test (i.e. it passed the test, which required

37 Witness statement of Mr Chan Yiu Fai at paras 6 and 8.

flames to self-extinguish within four seconds of removal of the source of ignition).

236. The authenticity of the fire-retardancy certificate dated 8 January 2024 has been put in issue:

(i) The certificate was issued in the name of the National Quality Supervision and Inspection Centre for Personal Protective Equipment (Beijing). That, however, was the institution's former name. Prior to the date of issuance of the certificate, the centre had adopted the new name 國家勞動保護用品質量檢驗檢測中心（北京）, omitting the two characters "監督" (supervision) from its title.[38] It is unlikely that a genuine certificate would bear an obsolete name of the issuer.

(ii) Mr Ku Siu Ping of the ICU accepted in evidence that, although no one at the ICU noticed the discrepancy when the certificate was received, after the fire, the ICU checked the accreditation number on the certificate and noted the two-character difference in the name of the issuing institution. The ICU's post-fire checks therefore establish that the certificate was not genuine.

(iii) Further, the ICU conducted an on-site burning testing of the scaffolding nets on 28 October 2024. One test showed that a scaffolding net continued to burn for over 10 seconds after the lighter was removed from the net and had to be blown out. Dr Lee of the Government Laboratory testified that,

38 The change of title was directed by the State Administration for Market Regulation, in accordance with the《市場監管總局關於進一步加強國家質檢中心管理的意見》(2021)16 號, dated 31 March 2021.

based on the video of the tests on that day,[39] she was of the opinion that there was cause for follow-up tests to be conducted in a laboratory setting.

237. Mr Chan Yiu Fai claimed that, in September 2024, Gain Profit acquired additional fire-retardant nets from a new supplier, Binzhou Yuanjin, which were used in phase II of the scaffolding works. He suggested that the nets acquired from Binzhou Yuanjin were of a superior quality.[40]

238. In 2025, Hong Kong was struck by two No 10 typhoons – Typhoon Wipha on 20 July and Super Typhoon Ragasa on 24 September. Both typhoons inflicted severe damage to the scaffolding nets. After each typhoon, Gain Profit carried out repair works to replace the damaged nets.

239. After Typhoon Wipha struck on 20 July 2025:

(i) According to Mr Chan Yiu Fai's account,[41] he was asked by Mr Gordon Ho of PC&E to purchase non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets to replace the damaged nets. Mr Chan recalls a specific conversation where he explained to Mr Ho that it was not appropriate to use non-fire-retardant nets, to which Mr Ho instructed him to order as he was told, noting that Gain Profit would not be reimbursed if it ordered fire-retardant scaffolding nets.

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39 Including the re-tests of the same piece of scaffolding net after the first failed attempt, which Dr Lee observed were conducted at an angle and distance from the fire which made it more difficult to ignite compared to a laboratory setting.

40 Witness statement of Mr Chan Yiu Fai at para 10.

41 Witness statement of Mr Chan Yiu Fai at para 14.

(ii) The Committee does not have a contemporaneous record of the conversation between Mr Chan Yiu Fai and Mr Gordon Ho. Nevertheless, the conversation was mentioned during the opening statement of Counsel for the Committee, and Mr Ho has had an opportunity to respond to Mr Chan's evidence.

(iii) Mr Gordon Ho's two witness statements did not contradict Mr Chan Yiu Fai's account. In his latest witness statement submitted on 2 July 2026, Mr Ho admitted that scaffolding nets were replaced after the typhoon in July 2025 and that another replacement took place after the typhoon in September 2025. He was unable to state what percentage of the nets came from which batch but believed that the first batch constituted the largest portion. As such, he claimed that "*the majority of the scaffolding nets were of a high quality and were priced above the level of standard products*".[42] This statement is notable because Mr Ho did not deny the fact that the scaffolding nets which replaced the damaged nets were not fire retardant. The Committee therefore has reason to believe that Mr Chan's account is the truth.

(iv) Gain Profit placed orders on 22 and 24 July, 16 August and 3 September 2025 for a total of 900 units of 1.8 m x 18 m scaffolding nets from Lam Kee at a price of HK$54 per unit, a different supplier from Shandong Chenxu, the initial supplier for the scaffolding nets.

42 2nd witness statement of Mr Gordon Ho at paras 32 and 33.

(v) In its letter in response to questions from the Committee, Lam Kee explained that all scaffolding nets were sold according to client specification, and that aside from a subsequent order on 27 October 2025, all of the orders placed by Gain Profit were expressly for non-fire-retardant nets.[43] Mr Chan Yiu Fai also admitted that he had arranged for his wife, Madam Zhong Fengping, to purchase non-fire-retardant nets from Lam Kee.[44]

240. After Super Typhoon Ragasa struck on 24 September 2025:

(i) Mr Chan Yiu Fai's evidence was that Super Typhoon Ragasa caused more serious damage to the scaffolding nets than Typhoon Wipha. Mr Chan admitted that, pursuant to Mr Gordon Ho's instructions, the scaffolding nets ordered to replace the damaged nets following Super Typhoon Ragasa were not fire-retardant.[45]

(ii) On 25, 26 and 30 September and 2 October 2025, Gain Profit placed further orders with Lam Kee for a total of 1,400 units of 1.8 m x 18 m non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets at a unit price of HK$54.

(iii) Gain Profit purchased further replacement nets from Binzhou Yuanjin. WeChat discussions between Mr Chan Yiu Fai and a representative of Binzhou Yuanjin on 25 and 28 September 2025 recorded that Mr Chan ordered 2,500 units of green non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets of 1.8m x 17 m per unit at a price of RMB 24 per unit.

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43 Letter from Lam Kee to the Committee at para 3.1.
44 Witness statement of Mr Chan Yiu Fai at para 14.
45 Witness statement of Mr Chan Yiu Fai at para 16.

(iv) On 27 September 2025, a works progress meeting was held between the MC, PC&E, Will Power and ISS. In the meeting, PC&E confirmed that they would only replace nets that had been damaged and those that had lost their protective function, and would not replace all nets across the estate. There was no disclosure of the fact that non-fire-retardant nets were used.

241. On 13 October 2025, Mr Chan Yiu Fai sent a voice message to Binzhou Yuanjin's representative through WeChat, asking whether he could buy fire-retardant agents to change the nets to fire-retardant ones. Binzhou Yuanjin replied that it was not possible.

242. Mr Chan Yiu Fai's enquiry proved timely:

(i) On 18 October 2025, a fire broke out at the scaffolding of the Chinachem Tower in Connaught Road Central.

(ii) This prompted the BD to issue a circular letter on 21 October 2025 ("BD October 2025 Circular"), calling on registered building professionals and RCs to take immediate action to inspect and ascertain that the protective net, screen, tarpaulin and plastic sheeting installed at the façade of buildings possess fire retardant properties in compliance with recognised standards, and reminding them of potential disciplinary action should materials with inadequate fire-retardant properties be discovered to have been used.

(iii) The ICU sent an email on 27 October 2025 to remind Will Power to comply with the BD's circular letter.

243. The Chinachem Tower fire prompted serious unease among residents. In a Facebook group for WF Court's residents, one user mentioned that if a similar fire occurred in WF Court, it could send several hundred people to their deaths in a sea of fire. Unfortunately, this worry became reality.

244. On 23 October 2025, Mr Kong Cheung Fat sent an email to Madam Amanda Lau of the ICU to follow up on a complaint he had sent earlier (which the ICU received through 1823 on 3 October 2025[46]) concerning scaffolding nets that were damaged after the typhoons. He noted the concerns from residents about the deteriorating state of the scaffolding nets following the Chinachem Tower fire and urged the ICU to carry out inspections.

245. On 25 October 2025, PC&E reported at a works progress meeting attended by the MC, PC&E, Will Power and ISS that the damaged scaffolding nets (except the rain canopies and catch fans) had been replaced completely. No disclosure was made to the MC that the replacement nets were non-fire-retardant.

246. In response to Mr Kong Cheung Fat's enquiry, the ICU arranged for an inspection. The following events occurred on 27 October 2025:

(i) At 08:50 hours, Madam Amanda Lau of the ICU sent a WhatsApp message to Mr Yeung Tsz Man of Will Power to arrange for an inspection in the afternoon of 28 October 2025. At 10:10 hours, Madam Lau asked Mr Yeung to arrange for Mr Sam Tam of PC&E to attend the inspection, and noted that the ICU wished to understand the specifications and fire

46 Ref No 41 in ICU list at Annex 8.

retardancy of the old nets and the new nets installed after the typhoon, further stating that Mr Ku Siu Ping wished to sample-test at every block.

(ii) By 09:54 hours, Mr Sam Tam messaged Mr Hau Wa Kin, expressly marked "not to be disclosed", that the ICU would attend the site the next afternoon to burn-test the nets.

(iii) Mr Chan Yiu Fai's evidence was that, on the same day (i.e. 27 October 2025), he received instructions from Mr Gordon Ho of PC&E to urgently replace the non-fire-retardant nets at the bottom of the scaffolding to fire-retardant ones, in anticipation of an inspection by the ICU.[47]

(iv) Accordingly, Gain Profit purchased 115 units of 1.8 m x 18 m fire-retardant nets from Lam Kee at a price of HK$100 per unit on 27 October 2025. In reply to the request made by the Legal Team, Lam Kee confirmed that this was the only fire-retardant batch it ever sold to Gain Profit, the price difference (HK$100 as against HK$54 per unit) reflecting the incorporation of fire-retardant agent in fire-retardant nets.

247. According to Mr Ku Siu Ping's evidence about the ICU's inspection on 28 October 2025:

(i) The inspection followed the ICU's quick test method of burning nets with a lighter. The nets were sampled from readily accessible locations on the rooftop and ground levels.

47 Witness statement of Mr Chan Yiu Fai at para 17.

(ii) The ICU considered that the quick tests did not give rise to specific concerns.

(iii) Mr Ku Siu Ping testified that had the ground-level nets not been switched, the deception by PC&E might have been discovered.

(iv) Mr Ku Siu Ping also confirmed that the ICU asked for but was not provided fire-retardancy certificates for the new nets. He explained that this was because Will Power represented to the ICU that the old and new nets were provided by the same supplier and that the same certificate was used.

248. On 20 November 2025, the LD inspected the site and asked for fire-retardancy certificates for the replacement nets. PC&E produced the same certificate dated 8 January 2024 purportedly issued by the National Quality Supervision and Inspection Centre for Personal Protective Equipment (Beijing), which certificate PC&E had already produced to the LD some 16 months earlier. Madam Lam Sau Ching accepted that no one at the LD compared this certificate against the copy on file.

249. [redacted] The replacements were acquired from different suppliers[48] expressly to a non-fire-retardant specification, at a lower price that reflected the lack of fire-retardant treatment. Had the replacement nets in fact been fire-retardant, PC&E could simply have produced a certificate for the new batch.

48 Save that Mr Chan Yiu Fai claims that Binzhou Yuanjin had also supplied fire-retardant nets for the phase II works.

250. Taking into account the evidence above, the Committee has reason to believe that a substantial proportion of the scaffolding nets enclosing the eight blocks at WF Court at the time of the fire were non-fire-retardant nets acquired to replace those damaged in the typhoons:

(i) Mr Chan Yiu Fai's evidence was that Typhoon Wipha caused severe damage to the scaffolding nets and Super Typhoon Ragasa caused even more severe damage.[49] As Mr Chan admitted, none of the new nets used to replace the damaged nets was fire-retardant, save for the order of 115 units from Lam Kee on 27 October 2025 that was procured for the ICU's inspection the following day.

(ii) The purchase records alone demonstrate that at least 4,800 units of non-fire-retardant nets, each measuring 1.8 m x 17 m or 18 m, were acquired between July and October 2025. The total surface area of these nets was approximately 150,000 m², an exceptionally large surface area by any measure.

(iii) By way of comparison, Mr Chan Yiu Fai's evidence indicates that the initial batch of allegedly fire-retardant nets for phase I of the works comprised only 1,500 units.[50]

(iv) As rightly observed by Mr Dawes SC, had only a small or negligible proportion of the scaffolding nets been replaced, it would have been unnecessary for PC&E and Gain Profit to urgently replace scaffolding nets at accessible locations with fire-retardant nets upon being informed of the ICU's

49 Witness statement of Mr Chan Yiu Fai at paras 14 and 16.
50 Witness statement of Mr Chan Yiu Fai at para 8.

intended inspection on 28 October 2025. The very fact and timing of the urgent replacement reflect their own understanding that the nets then enclosing the estate would fail inspection.

251. Further corroborating the extensive use of non-fire-retardant replacement nets is the photographic evidence. Scaffolding nets of a visibly lighter colour and greater translucency (characteristics which, on the evidence, distinguished the replacement nets installed after the typhoons) were seen in the area close to the seat of the fire at Wang Cheong House (Block F).



Figure 4-1: Photograph of the scaffolding nets during the initial stage of the fire at Wang Cheong House (Block F) (taken by a worker on site)

252. The following photograph, taken on 8 October 2025 (i.e. two weeks after Super Typhoon Ragasa), shows significant areas of lighter-coloured nets alongside large sections still torn away or stripped, exposing the bamboo scaffolding beneath. The photograph demonstrates the scale of the netting replacement required at the time.



Figure 4-2: Photograph taken on 8 October 2025 showing the condition of scaffolding nets after Super Typhoon Ragasa

(II) Scaffolding nets: the expert evidence

253. After the fire, tests were conducted by Dr Lee on the fire-retardancy of samples of scaffolding nets obtained from the scene.

254. Dr Lee explained that the national standard stipulated in GB 5725-2009 required the after-flame time of both horizontal and longitudinal burning tests to be no more than four seconds after the source of flame was removed. However, the standard required a sufficient

number of specimens: 10 specimens for condition A and five specimens for condition B[51].

255. According to Dr Lee, there were limitations in her tests in terms of both sample size (as a substantial portion of scaffolding nets were destroyed by the fire) and the quality of the nets (as the quality of the remaining scaffolding nets could have been affected by the fire). For example:

(i) For Wang Cheong House (Block F), Dr Lee obtained five samples of scaffolding nets, out of which four failed the after-flame test. However, Dr Lee pointed out that, as a result of the limitations identified above, this did not necessarily mean that 80% of the scaffolding nets in Wang Cheong House were non-fire-retardant.

(ii) Dr Lee gave the same explanation for the tests conducted on samples taken from Wang Tai House (Block E), where both samples failed the after-flame tests.

(iii) As for Wang Sun House (Block C), there were not enough samples to conduct both a horizontal and longitudinal test.

(iv) On the other hand, for the remaining blocks, while it appeared that about 80% of the samples had an after-flame time of no more than four seconds, that does not establish that the majority of scaffolding nets on those blocks were fire-retardant. When it was put to her that the results might

51 While the application scope, applicable materials, test environment, specimen size, etc. are the same, condition A differs from condition B in the conditioning, fuel source of the burner, flame application time and result determination. A table summarising the requirements under the two conditions are at Annex 9.

have reflected a "selection bias", Dr Lee preferred to characterise the same point as a limitation in site conditions. Either way, the Committee accepts that the consequence is the same: the nets most completely consumed by the fire are under-represented in the samples, so the test results cannot be read as representative of the scaffolding nets installed before the fire.

256. As to the evidence of Professor Yuen, fire engineering expert appointed by the Government:

(i) Tests conducted in Sichuan University of Science and Engineering to compare the characteristics of (a) fire-retardant scaffolding nets, (b) non-fire-retardant nets,[52] and (c) nets sampled from Wang Chi House (Block H) demonstrated that the nets sampled from Wang Chi House exhibited the fastest rate of fire spread and were eventually consumed by the fire.

52 These were uncertified scaffolding nets that were artificially deteriorated through heating and drying, and were confirmed to be non-fire-retardant.



Figure 4-3: Photographs showing fire spread on fire-retardant nets (left) and Wang Chi House (Block H) nets (right)

(ii) Full-size fire tests conducted in Sichuan University of Science and Engineering (specifically, Tests 11 and 13 mentioned in Professor Yuen Final Expert Report) showed that the rapid development of the fire at WF Court was "*likely due to the use of non-FR [fire-retardant] safety nets and non-FR canvases. If FR materials had been used, the fire would have self-extinguished*". Multiple videos and witnesses also confirmed that significant flaming droplets were observed from the nets at WF Court, which was consistent with non-fire-retardant behaviour. The combined effect of the safety nets collected from Wang Chi House (Block H) and non-fire-retardant canvas was to transform a small fire into a rapidly spreading fire along the re-entrant.

(iii) Based on his scientific analysis, Professor Yuen agreed with Counsel for the Committee that, assuming all other variables at WF Court remained exactly as they were – the only difference being that the scaffolding nets and canvases used on site possessed fire-retardant properties – the rapid vertical fire along the Wang Cheong House (Block F) re-entrant would not have developed. Professor Yuen also agreed that the non-fire-retardant netting was itself a very major factor in the rapid vertical fire spread within Wang Cheong House.

257. Professor Usmani and Professor Jiang, fire engineering experts appointed by the Committee reached similar conclusions:

(i) In experiments conducted on scaffolding net samples collected from Wang Chi House (Block H), they observed that the nets generated dripping flames and propagated ignition very rapidly after the source of the fire had been extinguished, which was the behaviour of non-fire-retardant materials. On the other hand, samples collected from Wang Kin House (Block D) did not exhibit this behaviour and appeared to be fire-retardant.

(ii) According to their simulations, the non-fire-retardant nets acted as a continuous vertical wick that enabled the flames to propagate across the 31 levels.

(iii) Professors Usmani and Jiang agreed with Professor Yuen that, if the safety nets and canvases at WF Court were fire retardant, the initial fire "*may*" have self-extinguished. They agreed that the behaviour of non-fire-retardant nets played an important role in initiating the fire to unlock the energy inside the bamboo sticks. However,

Professor Usmani emphasised that the operative word here is "*may*", and that there is an element of uncertainty.

258. The scientific evidence does not establish the exact proportions of fire-retardant and non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets on the day of the fire. In particular, Dr Lee was unable to express a conclusive opinion on the fire-retardancy of scaffolding net samples obtained from the scene, owing to limitations arising from the site conditions. Even so, the Committee agrees with Mr Dawes SC that the evidence set out in sub-section C4(I) above – including the admissions from Lam Kee and Mr Chan Yiu Fai, the repeated deployment of the 8 January 2024 certificate that appears not to be genuine, and the photographs showing the scale of net replacement after the two typhoons – provides a sufficient foundation for the Committee to make the relevant findings without laboratory precision.

259. Hence, based on the said available evidence and expert opinions, the Committee is able to conclude that a substantial proportion of the scaffolding nets enclosing the eight blocks at WF Court at the time of the fire were non-fire-retardant, even if fire-retardant nets may have been installed during the earlier stages of the works.

260. The use of a substantial amount of non-fire-retardant nets on the scaffolding was unacceptable. [redacted]

(III) Plastic sheeting and canvas

261. In addition to scaffolding nets, various types of plastic sheeting, also referred to as canvas, were also used around the scaffolding.



Figure 4-4: Photographs of plastic sheeting and canvas at WF Court (extracted from Dr Lee's presentation)

262. Dr To Chi Wing (witness no 77), who is the Secretary of the IFITF and the Divisional Commander (Airport) of the FSD, testified that plastic sheeting and canvases were found on the flat-roof on the first floor of each block (used as coverings to cover building materials stored in those locations) and were installed on the catch fans.

263. In the BD's circular letter dated 21 March 2023 ("BD 2023 Circular"), it was stated that protective net, screen, tarpaulin / plastic sheeting installed to cover the façade of buildings under repair or MW

should have appropriate fire-retardant properties in compliance with a recognised standard, including GB 5725-2009, BS 5867-2:2008 (Type B) and NFPA 701:2019 as examples.

264. Dr Lee testified that the national standard GB 5725-2009 might not apply to materials other than safety nets, and that the British standard BS 5867-2:2008 (Type B) would apply to plastic sheeting and canvas.

265. Dr Lee submitted a further statement dated 25 June 2026:

(i) Dr Lee explained that, in accordance with the requirements of BS 5867-2:2008 (Type B), when a flame is applied to the specimen for 15 seconds under controlled conditions, no part of any hole nor the lowest boundary of any flame may reach the top edge or either vertical edge of the sample, and there must be no separation of flaming debris droplets.

(ii) Dr Lee tested four samples of plastic sheeting obtained from Wang Chi House (Block H). The test results showed that, with the exception of one specimen, the flames or holes reached the upper or vertical edge of the specimens, thereby failing the requirements in BS 5867-2:2008 (Type B). Most of the test specimens were fully consumed in the tests. Dr Lee concluded that these samples were easily ignited by a small flame with remarkable spread, as well as generation of burning droplets which could aid the spread of fire.

266. Dr Lee's evidence was that the tests conducted on the plastic sheeting found at the scene burned more severely than the safety nets, and that *all* of these samples failed the applicable fire-retardancy standards (whichever standard was adopted).

267. Further, according to Professor Yuen, the large-scale fire tests in Sichuan University of Science and Engineering demonstrated that it was the combination of non-fire-retardant safety nets with non-fire-retardant canvas that produced sufficiently excessive heat to ignite bamboo sticks. This showed that non-fire-retardant canvas played a critical role in accelerating fire growth, transforming limited and localised fires into a widespread and intense blaze across 31 levels along the re-entrant.

268. In light of such expert evidence, the Committee accepts that the plastic sheeting and canvas on the scaffolding at WF Court on the day of the fire were not fire-retardant and contributed to the rapid spread of the fire.

(IV) Toe boards

269. Toe boards are low, vertical barriers installed along the edges of the horizontal platforms of the scaffolding. Dr Lee tested samples of toe boards obtained from various blocks at WF Court, and observed that these were all orange-coloured corrugated polypropylene boards with 2mm thickness.

270. According to laboratory tests conducted by Dr Lee, all of the toe board samples readily ignited after removing the direct source of the flame, sustained burning and generated burning droplets. The samples exhibited no sign of self-extinguishing. Based on such evidence, the Committee therefore finds that the toe boards used in WF Court were non-fire-retardant.

C5. Foam boards and related window protection materials

271. Following the erection of the scaffolding, the external wall repair works were to commence. The first step of the process required the protection of windows from being damaged during the process of hacking-off the existing external wall.

272. Concerns regarding the flammability of foam boards proposed to be used as window protection were raised as early as the works meeting on 17 June 2024.

(i) Will Power noted a concern that foam boards were readily ignited and would generate a large amount of smoke when burned. It suggested using plywood as an alternative material. PC&E replied that the protective functions of such alternative materials were poor compared to foam boards.

(ii) In the end, Will Power observed that each product had its pros and cons, but maintained the view that the use of foam boards carried a greater risk. Will Power stated that if PC&E insisted on using foam boards, it must consider the relevant risks and implement appropriate measures.

273. On 17 July 2024, PC&E issued a letter to Will Power (with copies to the MC and ISS) noting that approval had been given for the use of foam boards as window coverings at a works meeting on 16 July 2024. While there is no record of approval at any meeting on 16 July 2024, Will Power approved the contents of the letter with its chop and signature on 18 July 2024. The letter did not record that PC&E proposed any measures to address the fire safety risks of using foam boards.

274. Thereafter, the first batch of orders began to be placed for foam boards from late August 2024:

(i) Hoi Tak, the subcontractor responsible for plastering works on the external walls of Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Cheong House (Block F), placed three orders for foam boards from Hubei Yubo on 26 August, 3 September and 19 September 2024.

(ii) It was stated on the 19 September 2024 order that the foam boards were not fire-retardant. While the other two orders did not state whether the foam boards ordered were fire-retardant, the unit price for the foam boards was the same as that of the order of 19 September 2024 (RMB 350-360 per m^3).

275. By four invoices dated 27 August, 3 September, 9 September, and 17 September 2024, Hang Fung, an associated company of Hoi Tak, on-sold some of the foam boards to New Nam Fong, the subcontractor for external wall repairs for Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H).

276. As mentioned above, PC&E issued a notice on 23 August 2024 to notify residents of Wang Cheong House (Block F) that works would be conducted to cover windows with protective foam boards. Similar notices were issued in relation to the other phase I blocks, Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H), on or about 9 September 2024.

277. The evidence therefore suggests that the foam boards used in Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E), Wang Cheong House (Block F), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H) were the non-fire-retardant foam boards initially acquired by Hoi Tak from Hubei Yubo.

278. The evidence of the physical characteristics of the foam boards found on site corroborates the above conclusion:

(i) Two types of foam boards were found in WF Court, one embossed with a square-within-a-square pattern (⧈) and the other with a rhombus pattern (◊).

Photo 1: Close up view of 25C2826/15, showing view of foam board with pattern ◊

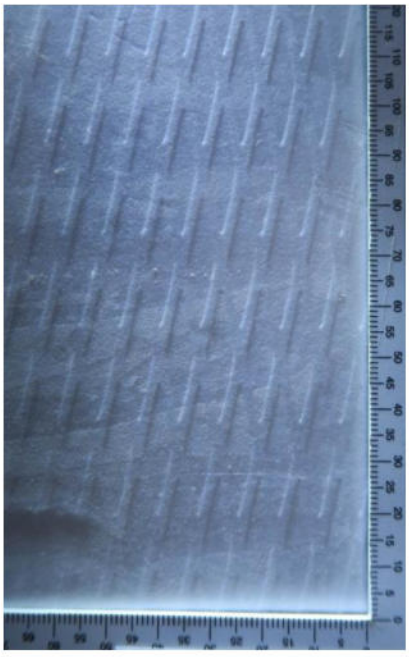


Photo 2: Close up view of 25C2827/14 showing view of foam board with pattern ⧈



Figure 4-5: Examples of the two types of foam boards found at WF Court (extracted from Dr Lee 's statement dated 5 March 2026)

(ii) Dr Lee observed that most of the foam boards found at WF Court after the fire were embossed with the square-within-square pattern, and found that these were more readily ignitable than the foam boards with a rhombus pattern. The foam boards with a square-within-square pattern readily ignited, with flame spread exceeding 150mm within 16 to 19 seconds of flame application, and burned throughout the specified test period, generating flaming droplets.

(iii) The evidence from residents also shows that the foam boards supplied before February 2025 had a different pattern from the subsequent foam boards with a rhombus pattern. The earlier foam boards had a square-within-square pattern and "CO2" markings.



Figure 4-6: Photograph of a foam board taken on 28 September 2024

279. On 11 September 2024, Mr Tony Tsui raised concerns about the flammability of the foam boards in the WhatsApp group with PC&E and Will Power. A member of the MC mentioned that residents were concerned that if the window covers were made of foam instead of aluminium composite material, it would be readily ignited by cigarette butts. According to Mr Tsui, PC&E then explained that it would not use aluminium composite boards because it was difficult to cut the material on site.

280. On 12 September 2024, a works meeting was held (attended by ISS, PC&E, Will Power, the MC and the URA), during which concerns were raised regarding the flammability of the foam boards. PC&E explained that the foam boards would not be ignited through contact with cigarette ends; however, the result would be different if they were ignited by a persistent naked flame. PC&E also noted that the law does not prohibit the use of such material.

281. On 13 September 2024, PC&E and MC representatives continued to discuss the use of foam boards in their WhatsApp group:

(i) Mr Sam Tam of PC&E sent videos to the WhatsApp group at 12:38 hours, purporting to demonstrate that the foam boards would not be ignited by cigarette butts. He qualified the demonstration, noting that if a naked flame were used, many materials could be ignited, including bamboo scaffolding and safety nets.

(ii) The MC remained concerned that these videos would not pacify the residents. At 12:44 hours, a member of the MC referred PC&E to a Facebook video which showed that the foam boards were flammable. Mr Tony Tsui also requested

that enquiries be made to the FSD and the BD to confirm that the foam board material was acceptable.

(iii) Mr Gordon Ho made PC&E's position clear at 13:28 hours. If the MC wished to replace the material for the protective window covers, it would have to wait until phase II because the foam boards for phase I had already arrived on site and the protection works were underway.

(iv) At 22:31 hours that evening, Mr Jason Wong circulated Will Power's written opinion. Will Power asserted that no law required protective material used during external wall renovation works (other than scaffolding nets) to be fire-retardant; that external wall repair works on existing buildings would not ordinarily pose a serious fire risk; and that foam boards were less likely than scaffolding nets to spread fire. Hence, it reasoned, only scaffolding nets were regulated by the BD's PNAP APP-70. Will Power concluded that effective prevention of fire spread would require all temporary materials on the façade to be fire retardant, and that requiring foam boards alone to be fire retardant was an unrealistic idea.

282. PC&E's progress reports indicated that, by 17 September 2024, foam boards had already been installed on some windows, and the protection works for phase I had been 15% completed.

283. On 17 September 2024, Mr Steven Choi of Will Power reported in the WhatsApp group that he made a telephone call to the FSD to enquire as to the use of foam boards and was informed by the FSD that there was no law specifying whether foam boards could be used.

284. Will Power's explanation did not allay the MC's concerns. On 19 September 2024, Mr Tony Tsui requested Will Power to explain in writing to the residents why it had accepted the use of foam boards – which were not fire-retardant – as protective material.

285. Will Power never issued a written explanation to the residents. Instead, the residents received a verbal explanation during the briefing sessions held on 28 and 29 September 2024, during which PC&E accepted that the foam boards could be ignited with naked flames.

286. The MC eventually enquired with the FSD (through its Vice Chairman, Mr Mak Chi Hung Benny) by email on 4 October 2024, highlighting the fact that "*most of the windows*" were covered by foam boards, and that residents were "*at high risks as the foam board is found to be highly flammable*".[53] The FSD's response was to tell Mr Mak to seek advice from the BD and the LD.

287. Meanwhile, alternative solutions for window protection were considered.

(i) Mr Tony Tsui's evidence is that the MC considered switching from foam boards to corrugated plastic boards. The MC tested samples of this material with a lighter and found it to be relatively flame retardant. Yet, PC&E refused to replace foam boards with corrugated plastic boards on the basis that corrugated boards were rigid and therefore difficult to cut on site.

(ii) On 2 October 2024, Mr Gordon Ho privately messaged Mr Tony Tsui to ask whether the MC would consider replacing

53 Ref No 19 in the FSD list at Annex 8.

foam boards with 2.5 mm corrugated plastic boards for phases II and III. Mr Tsui responded by asking whether PC&E could source foam boards that were less easily ignitable, and requested Mr Ho to film a burn test to demonstrate that the foam boards would self-extinguish, in which case no certificate would be needed.

(iii) When asked about these messages, Mr Tony Tsui testified that PC&E and Will Power had repeatedly told him that there was no certification system for foam boards, which was why he framed his request in that way. The messages show that he sent Mr Gordon Ho a link to a supplier's video to demonstrate that foam boards with fire-retardant properties were commercially available. He told Mr Ho that PC&E's own test video should not be as unconvincing as that of the supplier (the original Chinese reads: "*唔好咁流*"). What he meant was that the foam board should be burned for a longer period to show that it could self-extinguish.

288. Eventually, PC&E used corrugated plastic boards alongside foam boards (but not in place of them) for window protection. According to a document issued by PC&E on 2 October 2024 describing the workflow of the external wall repair works:

(i) Foam boards would first be placed over all glass windows of the units to protect them against damage.

(ii) Windows located on the floors undergoing external hacking-off works would receive an additional layer of temporary protection by way of an additional thin wooden board or corrugated plastic board.

(iii) The additional wooden board or corrugated plastic board would be immediately removed after works were completed on that particular floor.

(iv) In contrast, the foam boards would remain on the windows even when the hacking-off works were completed.

289. Around this time (i.e. early October 2024), the MC and PC&E agreed that new batches of foam boards with improved fire-retardancy would be ordered for phases II and III.

(i) PC&E stated at a works meeting on 19 October 2024 that a new batch of foam boards would arrive the following week, and it would conduct a burning test on those boards.

(ii) On 26 October 2024, PC&E stated in a further works meeting that the second batch of foam boards had arrived and PC&E tested them with a lighter, which showed that they were fire retardant.

(iii) This coincides with the evidence that, in early October 2024, Mr Yiu Kam Fai of Shing Construction obtained a sample foam board from its supplier Wuhan Hansu. This batch was supported by a purported fire-retardancy certificate issued by Hubei Provincial Building Material Energy Conservation Testing Centre (English translation) (湖北省建築材料節能檢測中心).

(iv) Further foam boards were acquired on 20 November 2024, when Hoi Tak placed an order of foam boards with Wuhan Hansu. This order was expressly for fire-retardant foam

boards at a unit price of RMB 16.5 per 0.02 m^3, more than double the unit price of the non-fire-retardant foam boards ordered from Hubei Yubo for phase I.[54] Subsequently, Hoi Tak on-sold some of these new foam boards to New Nam Fong.[55]

(v) Mr Yiu Kam Fai of Shing Construction ordered additional foam boards from Wuhan Hansu on 16 December 2024. These foam boards were accompanied by a purported fire-retardancy certificate.

290. While the new batches of foam boards were intended to be used in phases II and III, the evidence suggests that the subcontractors did not pay particular attention to which batch of foam boards collected at the site was used for installation at which blocks.

291. The subsequent batches of foam boards were embossed with a rhombus pattern. As noted above, Dr Lee observed that the more flammable type of foam board, i.e. the initial batches embossed with a

54 These foam boards were apparently accompanied by a fire-retardant certificate issued by Jiangsu JianKe Appraisal & Consultation Co., Ltd. (English translation) (江蘇建科鑑定顧問諮詢有限公司). However, this report was requested by Shanghai Xinpuda Energy Technology Co., Ltd. (English translation) (上海鑫普達能源科技有限公司) ("Shanghai Xinpuda"), not Wuhan Hansu. On its face, the report is not referable to the batch of foam boards supplied by Wuhan Hansu. According to Mr Yiu Kam Fai's statement to the Police, Shanghai Xinpuda is a client of Wuhan Hansu and it had itself conducted a fire-retardancy test on the products supplied by Wuhan Hansu. In turn Wuhan Hansu gave Hoi Tak the fire-retardancy test result obtained by Shanghai Xinpuda on its products because Wuhan Hansu ran out of certificates that it obtained. This explanation is unconvincing, and does not show that the fire-retardancy certificate is genuinely referable to the foam boards supplied by Wuhan Hansu to Hoi Tak.

55 On 22 November 2024, 24 November 2024, and 16 January 2025, Hoi Tak sold some of the foam boards to New Nam Fong. Since the unit price is also RMB 16.5 per 0.02 m^3, it can be inferred that Hoi Tak on-sold part of the new batch of foam boards it purchased from Wuhan Hansu to New Nam Fong.

square-within-a-square pattern, was more extensively found at the scene, whereas the foam boards with rhombus pattern were rarely found.

292. Dr Lee also opined that the subsequent batches of foam boards (with the rhombus pattern) exhibited fire-retardant properties. This appears to be consistent with the purported fire-retardancy certificates that accompanied some of the new batches. Nevertheless, it is important to observe that in Dr Lee's opinion, if a continuous source of flame was applied to the foam boards (of whichever type), the foam boards would continue to combust. Professor Yuen also opined that, once ignited, foam boards would produce burning droplets and dangerous toxic smoke.

293. The evidence suggests that foam boards remained substantially affixed to the windows of various units of the blocks on the day of the fire, save that:

(i) According to the evidence of subcontractors hired for the stone-washing of external walls, the foam boards affixed to the windows of Flats 2 and 3 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) had been removed prior to the day of the fire, as works on those parts of the external wall had essentially been completed and cleansing works were being carried out.

(ii) Madam Chung Sui Ha of ISS (a building attendant at Wang Cheong House (Block F)) heard from residents that only a small portion of the foam boards had been removed.

294. As mentioned above, corrugated plastic boards were used to provide a temporary second layer of protection to the windows, which were removed after the hacking-off works were completed on a particular floor.

In addition, Dr Lee's evidence was that some windows at WF Court were also found covered by semi-translucent corrugated plastic boards.



Figure 4-7: Photograph showing mixed use of foam board and corrugated plastic boards at a living room at Wang Chi House (Block H) (extracted from Dr Lee's presentation)

295. According to Dr Lee's laboratory tests, some types of corrugated plastic boards obtained from the scene lacked fire-retardant properties. She observed sustained burning on all corrugated plastic boards, with the 2 mm and 5 mm corrugated boards further generating flaming droplets with no signs of self-extinguishing, whereas the 9 mm corrugated boards were less susceptible to ignition.

C6. Combustible rubbish and debris on the scaffolding

296. The accumulation of combustible rubbish and debris on the scaffolding platforms and light wells was a persistent issue prior to the fire:

(i) Madam Ng Oi See Elsie (witness no 4), a resident of Flat 305 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) (which was located directly above the seat of the fire), testified that she would hear construction material falling from height almost every day during the works and that the scaffolding outside her flat was littered with construction waste, including foam boards, nylon strips, and paper sheets.

(ii) Mr Chau Chi Wai (witness no 20), a resident of Flat 207 of Wang Cheong House (Block F), likewise described the accumulation of rubbish on the scaffolding platforms outside his windows. He testified that workers often stripped the backing paper from the mosaic tiles and threw it down from the scaffolding, but never swept it. The rubbish piled up in the lower floors and flat roof like a rubbish dump.

(iii) A lower-floor resident of Wang Tai House (Block E), Mr Cheng King Hei (witness no 9), also observed a large amount of rubbish outside his bedroom windows, including left-over materials. He complained to PC&E about its failure to clear the rubbish, and on two occasions PC&E did clear the rubbish and left-over foam boards.

(iv) The accumulation of rubbish on the scaffolding was the source of persistent complaints. The WhatsApp group between the MC and PC&E recorded many of these complaints, including on 3 October 2024 (left-over foam boards outside a window), 5 October 2024 (accumulation of rubbish on a flat roof of Wang Chi House (Block H)), 12 November 2024 (rubbish and cigarette butts found on Wang Chi House lower floor), 24 July 2025 (rubbish on the scaffolding), 18 August 2025 (rubbish left-over from tiling),

20 August 2025 (rubbish in Wang Shing House (Block G)), 20 September 2025 (rubbish on scaffolding), and 8 October 2025 (workers found urinating and leaving rubbish on the scaffolding).

(v) On 7 October 2024, PC&E's agreement to clear the rubbish on the flat roofs once a week was noted by ISS. Subsequently, in the works meeting on 27 September 2025, the MC requested PC&E to clear the rubbish on the scaffolding on a daily basis.

(vi) Mr Tony Tsui accepted that, despite these measures, the accumulation of rubbish persisted, was a constantly recurring problem and was never completely resolved.

297. The witness evidence is corroborated by photographs taken before the fire, which showed a large amount of combustible waste on the scaffolding.



Figure 4-8: Photograph taken on 20 August 2025 (showing the accumulation of carton paper, backing paper and foam boards on a scaffolding platform)

298. After the fire, burnt remnants of combustible waste were also found upon the excavation of debris from the flat roof platform outside Flats 4 and 5 of Wang Cheong House (Block F), including large amounts of carton paper believed to be used in the packaging of the mosaic tiles.

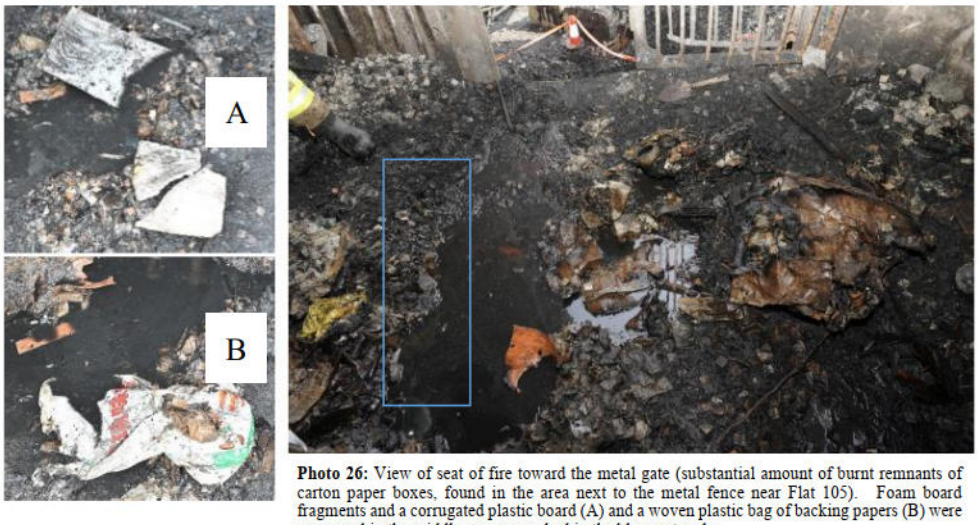


Photo 26: View of seat of fire toward the metal gate (substantial amount of burnt remnants of carton paper boxes, found in the area next to the metal fence near Flat 105). Foam board fragments and a corrugated plastic board (A) and a woven plastic bag of backing papers (B) were recovered in the middle area as marked in the blue rectangle

Figure 4-9: Photograph taken from excavated seat of the fire (extracted from Dr Lee's presentation)

C7. Access openings in the staircases

299. When the scaffolding was erected, PC&E replaced the windows in the staircases of WF Court with openings to provide temporary access points for workers to access and exit the scaffolding.

300. The evidence shows that access openings were created at approximately every five floors in the staircases of the buildings. These openings were colloquially referred to as "saang hau" (生口), and were made by removing the staircase windows and fitting an aluminium

composite or wooden board as a door to cover the openings. The door was opened during the day for worker access and locked at night.[56]

301. On 1 August 2024, PC&E wrote to Will Power to seek its approval for the creation of access openings at the 15th floor of each block, for the convenience of workers to enter and exit the building through the scaffolding. Will Power marked its approval of the submission on the same day.

302. On 22 August 2024, i.e. three weeks later, PC&E wrote to Will Power seeking its approval to create access openings on the 5th, 10th, 20th and 25th floors of each block. Again, Will Power marked its approval on the same day.

303. The subcontractors' evidence was that they were asked by PC&E to make an access opening every five floors, except for the access openings that were already created on the 15th floor. For example:

(i) Mr Ng Pui Kwan testified that he was instructed by PC&E to open an access opening in the rear staircase every five floors, except for the opening on the 15th floor which had already been created. When he asked whether it was permissible to create these openings, he was told to just do so as asked. In a statement provided to the Police, Mr Ng suggested that the access openings he created at Wang Cheong House (Block F) were created before October 2024.

56 Statement of Mr Wong Luen Kuen given to the Police on 18 December 2025.

(ii) Mr Wong Luen Kuen's evidence was that he began to create access openings in the staircase of Wang Yan House (Block A) on 3 January 2025. He was instructed by one of the site managers to create access openings on the 5th, 10th, 20th and 25th floors, and that if he was unsure how to make the openings, he should refer to the pre-existing opening on the 15th floor.

304. Therefore, the access openings were created shortly after the scaffolding was erected for each block and remained in place for a substantial period of time up to the day of the fire.



Figure 4-10: Photographs of access openings (extracted from the IFITF Final Report)

305. Despite instructions to create access openings every five floors, some subcontractors may have mistakenly created openings on different floors. This is evident from the IFITF's summary of the access openings (see, for example, the access openings in Wang Yan House (Block A)).

Building	Staircase	Floor
Wang Yan House (Block A)	Rear staircase	between 3/F & 4/F
	Front staircase	between 8/F & 9/F
	Rear staircase	between 15/F & 16/F
	Rear staircase	between 19/F & 20/F
	Front staircase	between 24/F & 25/F
	Front staircase	between 28/F & 29/F
Wang Tao House (Block B)	Front staircase	between 4/F & 5/F
	Front staircase	between 10/F & 11/F
	Rear staircase	between 15/F & 16/F
	Front staircase	between 20/F & 21/F
	Front staircase	between 26/F & 27/F
Wang Sun House (Block C)	Rear staircase	between 5/F & 6/F
	Front staircase	between 10/F & 11/F
	Rear staircase	between 15/F & 16/F
	Rear staircase	between 19/F & 20/F
	Front staircase	between 24/F & 25/F
Wang Kin House (Block D)	Front staircase	between 4/F & 5/F
	Rear staircase	between 9/F & 10/F
	Rear staircase	between 15/F & 16/F
	Rear staircase	between 19/F & 20/F
	Front staircase	between 24/F & 25/F

Building	Staircase	Floor
Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Cheong House (Block F)	Rear staircase	between 5/F & 6/F
	Front staircase	between 10/F & 11/F
	Rear staircase	between 15/F & 16/F
	Front staircase	between 20/F & 21/F
	Rear staircase	between 25/F & 26/F
Wang Shing House (Block G)	Rear staircase	between 3/F & 4/F
	Rear staircase	between 9/F & 10/F
	Front staircase	between 14/F & 15/F
	Rear staircase	between 19/F & 20/F
	Front staircase	between 24/F & 25/F
Wang Chi House (Block H)	Front staircase	between 4/F & 5/F
	Rear staircase	between 9/F & 10/F
	Front staircase	between 14/F & 15/F
	Rear staircase	between 19/F & 20/F
	Front staircase	between 24/F & 25/F

Figure 4-11: Table summarising the locations of access openings (extracted from the IFITF Final Report)

306. In any event, the evidence establishes that the access openings were not necessary for the works on the external wall:

(i) While Mr Ng Pui Kwan suggested that the creation of access openings was a common practice, he agreed that it was only a measure of convenience to the workers and was not essential for the hacking-off works to be carried out.

(ii) Likewise, Mr Zhang Minghai agreed that access openings were unnecessary for his work on the external walls, and that it was purely a convenience for workers. He added that many external renovations did not have access openings.

307. No complaint or enquiry about the fire risks of the access openings was made to the FSD or the ICU before the fire. The former head of the ICU, Mr Lau Fu Kwok (witness no 73), accepted that the system at the time relied on self-supervision by the contractors and professionals, together with complaints from residents, yet residents without building expertise would not have recognised that a staircase opening was a fire hazard or that it was something to complain about.

308. This is borne out by the evidence. With a single exception, the evidence suggests that those involved failed to appreciate the fire hazards at the time. For example:

(i) Mr Ng Pui Kwan testified that he did not appreciate or understand the effect of access openings on the staircases as a safe means of escape.

(ii) Mr Tony Tsui also stated that, while residents did raise queries on whether access openings were necessary, it did not occur to the New MC that the access openings gave rise to fire hazards.

(iii) Similarly, Madam Cheng Tsz Ying accepted that ISS knew that the staircase windows at every five floors were converted to access openings, but that it was not aware of the fire hazards arising from this practice.

309. The single instance where a fire safety concern was raised about the access openings came from a layman – but his query was not taken up by the contractor or the consultant:

(i) According to the WhatsApp group messages between PC&E and the Former MC, on 7 August 2024, Mr Tang Kwok Kuen, who described himself as a layman, enquired whether the window position should use fire-retardant or fire-resistant material.

(ii) Mr Kong Cheung Fat (a member of the MC at the time) accepted that, apart from that single remark, the materials disclosed show no further discussion of the fire risk of access openings.

C8. Fire-rated windows

310. Related to the access openings were the MW to replace the existing staircase windows with fire-rated windows.

311. In Will Power's inspection reports submitted in December 2019, issues with the buildings' fire safety facilities were noted. In particular, Will Power noted that the staircase windows were not fire-rated, and recommended replacing them with windows that met current requirements for fire resistance.

312. In the finalised tender document produced by Will Power on 27 March 2023, renovation of all 1/F to 31/F staircase windows was listed as part of the renovation works.

313. The replacement of staircase windows was not mandated under the MBIS. The issue of whether the staircase windows should be replaced with fire-rated ones was therefore put to a vote amongst the residents.

314. At the EGM on 28 January 2024, Will Power explained that there was no mandatory requirement to replace the windows, as WF Court had yet to receive a Fire Safety Direction under the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572). Nevertheless, the owners resolved by a majority of 76.82% votes to replace existing windows of staircases with fire-rated windows.

315. Replacement of staircase windows with fire-rated windows (with no less than 30 minutes of fire-resistance) was duly incorporated into the Works Contract.

316. Forms MW01 (Notice of Commencement of Class I MW) for each building were then submitted by the AP appointed for such works (see paragraph 318 below) to the ICU to notify it of the proposed alteration of windows in the staircases from 1/F to 31/F. The new windows were proposed to have a 60-minute fire-resistance rating. Each Form MW01 included a site SP, requiring building professionals and contractors to conduct site inspections at the specified frequency levels.

317. The Forms were submitted pursuant to the building works control system under the BO. The details about the operation of such system will be set out in Chapter 9 of this Report.

318. The Forms MW01 listed the following contractors and building professionals responsible for the window replacement works:

(i) Motive Design: subcontractor responsible to submit MW submissions and site SPs for Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Tao House (Block B);

(ii) Chi Fu Construction: subcontractor responsible to submit MW submissions and site SPs for the remaining blocks (Blocks C to H);

(iii) Mr Eric Lai: AP for all eight blocks; and

(iv) Mr Joseph Chi: RSE for all eight blocks.

319. In answer to the Committee's requests for information, these contractors and building professionals all confirmed that they had no direct contractual relationship with PC&E. The relevant chain of contracts was as follows:

(i) By a written contract signed on 2 September 2024, PC&E sub-contracted the replacement of staircase windows with fire-rated windows to Wealth Pinnacle, for a total contract price of HK$2,503,200.

(ii) According to Mr Eric Lai, Wealth Pinnacle engaged Allied Architects to provide services in relation to the staircase window works. He was in turn engaged by Allied Architects for his services which covered all eight blocks. He claimed to have reviewed the submissions to the ICU and to have personally conducted weekly site inspections to verify that the window replacement works generally conformed to the submission requirements.

(iii) Mr Joseph Chi confirmed that he was engaged by Allied Architects pursuant to a verbal agreement. His service also covered all eight blocks. He claimed to have verified the drawing and structural calculations before submission to the ICU, and to have personally carried out site inspections.

(iv) Wealth Pinnacle in turn engaged Chi Fu Construction by way of an oral contract. According to Chi Fu Construction, its only role was to submit MW submissions and site SPs for the staircase window replacement MW in Blocks C to H. The actual works were conducted by Wealth Pinnacle.

(v) On the other hand, Motive Design was engaged by Mr Eric Lai. Its role was to submit MW submissions and site SPs for the staircase window replacement MW in Blocks A and B. Again, according to Motive Design, the actual window replacement works were conducted by Wealth Pinnacle.

320. Each of Motive Design, Chi Fu Construction, Mr Eric Lai and Mr Joseph Chi confirmed awareness of the access openings:

(i) The MW submissions to the ICU contained photographs of the access openings. According to Mr Eric Lai, he observed from these submissions that some of the original windows had already been removed and covered by wooden boards before his involvement. However, he claimed not to be aware that these access openings potentially involved illegality, noting that the original windows were openable and non-fire-rated and were not resistant to smoke and fire in any event.

(ii) In Mr Joseph Chi's response to the Committee, he confirmed that he noticed the removal of staircase windows every five storeys. However, he did not regard the openings to be different compared to the openable windows before the replacement works. He considered that both situations allow fire and smoke to enter the staircase.

(iii) Motive Design replied to state that the access openings existed when Wealth Pinnacle entered the site. Motive Design was aware of the access openings but did not consider it to be an issue. Chi Fu Construction was also aware that access openings were created, noting that it was a common procedure.

321. Replacement works for the staircase windows were initially scheduled in phases. Phase I (Blocks F – H) was scheduled to commence on 20 January 2025, phase II (Blocks C – E) was scheduled to commence on 24 February 2025, and phase III (Blocks A – B) was scheduled to commence on 2 May 2025.

322. The first record of the commencement of staircase windows works is the progress report on 21 February 2025, under which "*Replace Staircase Windows*" was listed under "*FS Installations Improvement Works*", and was stated to have been 25% completed for Phase I.

323. By 29 March 2025, a progress report recorded that the staircase window replacement works were largely completed save for floors with access openings for phase I.

324. The staircase window replacement works for Phase II were first listed as "*Works to be Conducted in Upcoming 2 Weeks Period*" in the

progress report dated 12 April 2025. Phase II staircase replacement works were largely completed save for floors with access openings by the time of the progress report dated 7 June 2025.

325. As for phase III, the staircase window replacement works were first listed as "*Works to be Conducted in Upcoming 2 Weeks Period*" in the progress report dated 24 May 2025. They were largely completed save for floors with access openings by the time of the progress report dated 16 August 2025.

326. Therefore, on the day of the fire, all of the windows in the staircases were replaced with fire-rated windows, except the access openings which remained on approximately every five floors. This state of affairs was confirmed by the FSD's witness, Mr Lam Kin Kwan (Deputy Chief Fire Officer ("DCFO"), New Territories South) ("DCFO Lam") (witness no 74).

C9. Water tank works

327. A point of controversy was the renovation works to the various roof-top water tanks, including the FS tanks of each block.

328. The evidence establishes that various FSIs were not functional on the day of the fire. The sections below examine how the renovation of the FS tanks led to the shutdown of the FSIs.

(I) Initial planning of water tank works

329. In WF Court, the rooftop of each block contained three public water tanks, being the FS tank, a domestic water tank, and a salt-water tank or flush water tank.

330. In Will Power's inspection reports submitted in December 2019, defects were found in the rooftop water tanks, including severe rust staining and cracks in the internal walls of the tanks and rusting of the mercury float switch in the FS tanks. Repairs to the water tanks were therefore recommended.

331. Renovation works to all public concrete water tanks were subsequently included as part of the listed works in the finalised tender document, and were retained as part of the listed works in the Works Contract.

332. The particular specifications in the Works Contract provided that, unless otherwise specified, the scope of the waterproofing and retiling works for the water tanks included all rooftop public water tanks, including the domestic water tank, flush water tank and FS tank.

333. The key steps of the water tank repairs involved the following:

(i) the hacking-off of existing finishes, rendering and waterproofing layer down to the concrete surface;

(ii) application of a water-proof layer with a water test after completion of this step; and

(iii) tiling of all tank surfaces with white glazed tiles.

334. In the Inquiry, there was a suggestion by Mr Chung Kit Man that it was unnecessary for FS tanks to be retiled with white glazed tiles, which are normally required for freshwater tanks for sanitary purposes. In

any event, tiling and water-proofing of the FS tanks were part of the agreed works under the Works Contract.

335. Repair works for the tanks were initially planned to commence on 2 December 2024.

336. PC&E noted at a works meeting on 13 November 2024 attended by the MC, ISS and Will Power, that renovation works for the FS tanks should be undertaken first, followed by the salt water and domestic water tanks. This was to allow for the FS tanks (once renovated) to serve as temporary domestic water tanks while the original domestic water tanks were being repaired.

337. It was therefore contemplated that the FS tanks' function of storing water for fire-fighting purposes would remain suspended beyond the period of the renovation of the FS tanks themselves. But what was not addressed was how long that suspension would last.

338. Mr Kong Cheung Fat agreed that, at the time, there was no discussion of whether the conversion of the FS tanks into temporary freshwater tanks was necessary, nor of the alternative of providing a separate temporary water tank. Mr Tony Tsui also accepted that these matters were not considered. This was despite PC&E's contractual obligation, where necessary, to supply a temporary water tank, and Will Power's earlier indication that a fibre temporary water tank might be provided.

339. At a works meeting on 15 March 2025, PC&E stated that they would go ahead with the FS tank renovation works (under three phrases, with each phase estimated to last about 1.5 to 2 months).

(II) Commencement and progress of the water tank works

340. The FS tank repairs were carried out by two of PC&E's subcontractors, each handling four blocks: Red Sun (Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D) and Wang Tai House (Block E)) and Tin Hung (Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Cheong House (Block F), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H)).

341. At a works meeting on 29 March 2025 attended by the MC, Will Power, PC&E, ISS and some residents, PC&E reported that FS tank renovation works would begin at Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Chi House (Block H) starting from 7 April 2025. It was reported that the FS tanks would be temporarily out of operation and that the SDNs would be submitted to the FSD.

342. From the PC&E progress reports available, it can be seen that "*Water Tank Waterproofing*" was first listed as a "*Works to be Conducted in Upcoming 2 Weeks Period*" on 26 April 2025 for phases I and II.

343. By 19 July 2025, the renovation works for FS tanks in Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H) had reached the stage of water-testing. The progress report indicated that renovation works for the FS tanks at Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Sun House (Block C) had commenced.

344. At a works meeting held on 30 August 2025, which was attended by the MC, Will Power, PC&E, ISS and some residents, PC&E and Will Power reported that the FS tank renovations in Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H) were completed, and they would

discuss with ISS to arrange for the conversion of the FS tanks into temporary domestic water tanks. They reported that the FS tank renovation works for Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Cheong House (Block F) remained in progress.

345. This report was consistent with the progress report dated 13 September 2025. The progress report on 27 September 2025 was the last time the FS tank renovation progress was reported by PC&E in a formal progress report.[57]

346. Among the documents seized by the Police from PC&E's temporary office was an internal works progress report dated 19 November 2025. The report recorded further progress in the FS tank works:

(i) The renovation works for the FS tanks in Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Shing House (Block G) had been fully completed.

(ii) There were outstanding works in Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Chi House (Block H), including the finishing coat of render and retiling with white glazed tiles.[58]

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57 Works progress report #36 dated 27 September 2025 prepared by PC&E. The progress report recorded that the renovation works in the FS tanks of Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H) had fully completed (with the tiling of white glazed tiles) and that the water tests had completed in the FS tanks of Wang Kin House (Block D) and Wang Tai House (Block E).

58 It is notable that the renovation works of the FS tank in Wang Chi House (Block H) were recorded as fully completed as of 27 September 2025, while outstanding works were noted for the same block on 19 November 2025. As explained below, it appears that water leakage was subsequently found in the FS tank at Wang Chi House.

(iii) Despite the remaining works, all of the FS tanks had gone through a water test at some point in time.

347. According to the evidence from workers employed by Red Sun and Tin Hung, their works on refurbishing the walls of the FS tanks at Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Shing House (Block G) had been completed by early November 2025. Those FS tanks were waiting for a plumbing subcontractor to carry out follow-up works (such as installing buoys and a water gate and re-configuring the pipes for the purposes of converting the FS tank into a fresh water tank). As to Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Chi House (Block H), the works remained outstanding due to water leakage.

348. The evidence therefore establishes that, on the day of the fire, the FS tanks of the majority of blocks had been completed as required under the Works Contract, but the tanks were inoperative pending follow-up plumbing work, including works required to convert the FS tanks into domestic water tanks. The renovation works for the FS tanks in Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Chi House (Block H) were likely to be incomplete.

349. A related issue concerns the conflicting evidence on whether the FS tanks remained empty at the time of the fire:

(i) According to Victory Fire's plumber, Mr Tong Hing Lun, in the course of carrying out plumbing works related to the FS tanks on 16 October 2025, he opened the tanks of Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Sun House (Block C) and found them completely empty. He was told that the FS tanks were undergoing renovation, so

there was no water. On 17 October 2025, when he continued with plumbing works related to the FS tanks on the other five blocks, he did not check whether those FS tanks had water.

(ii) On the other hand, photographs taken around August to early November 2025 show that various FS tanks had been filled with water.

(iii) Those photographs do not necessarily indicate that the renovation works for the FS tanks had finished. The FS tanks may have been filled with water solely for the purposes of water testing (i.e. to check the integrity of the water-proofing layer). If an FS tank passed the water test, the water would be drained and tiling works would begin.

(iv) As noted earlier, all of the FS tanks had gone through a water test at some point prior to 19 November 2025. The photographs may well have been taken during those tests.

(v) For completeness, according to the FSD's inspection between 28 November and 1 December 2025, it was observed that the FS tanks were all empty except those in Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Shing House (Block G).

C10. Shutdown of FSI

350. One of the central issues in these hearings concerns the shutdown of FSIs on the day of the fire, in particular the FASs and the FHHRSs. Each block was equipped with one FAS and FHHRS.

351. The mechanism of the FSI systems was described in the FSD's Report on FSI of WF Court. That account aligns with the following summary provided by Mr Wong Kin Wa, an electrician employed by Victory Fire:

(i) On each floor the corridor carries a fire alarm bell and a break-glass call point. Breaking the glass initiates the fire booster pump to run and the alarm bell to sound. The corridor on each floor has a hose reel. There is also a fire hydrant outlet in the rear staircase on each floor, used by firefighters to draw water in the staircases in the event of a fire.[59]

(ii) On the ground floor there are two pump rooms: (a) a pump room housing the domestic water and salt-water upfeed pump together with the FS upfeed pump, which refills the FS tank on the roof-top drawing water from the ground floor FS transfer tank in the pump room; and (b) a FS pump room housing the two FS booster pumps that serve to boost the water pressure in the FHHRS for firefighting purposes.

352. In the FS pump room, there is a main control panel and an adjacent box containing the master power switch, colloquially referred to as "刀掣" (English translation: Knife Switch).

59 The water is sourced from the fire appliances, which feed water to the building through FS inlets located on the ground floor of each building.



Figure 4-12: Photograph of the main control panel (left) and master power switch (right) in the FS pump room of Wang Yan House (Block A)

(i) According to Mr Wong Kin Wa, the master switch supplies power to the alarm bells and break-glass call points as well as the FS booster pump. In other words, switching off the master power switch disables both the FAS and the FS booster pump.

(ii) Victory Fire's director, Mr Chung Kit Man, broadly agreed with Mr Wong Kin Wah's evidence but added that the master switch in the FS pump room controls only the FS booster pump and the FAS, but not the upfeed pumps (which were in the other pump room).

(iii) The FSD's evidence, via Mr Keung Sai Ming, Assistant Director (Licensing & Certification) ("AD Keung") (witness no 35), was also that the same master switch powers both the FAS and FHHRS.

353. To carry out the FS tank repair works, the FS tanks had to be drained. The preponderance of evidence indicates that switching off the master power switch – and with it the FASs – was not required for that purpose:

(i) Mr Chung Kit Man's evidence was that the upfeed pump must be switched off but it was not strictly necessary to switch off the FS booster pumps. In practice, however, the FS booster pumps would usually be switched off as well, because running the FS booster pump dry would damage it.[60]

(ii) To switch off the FS booster pumps, it was not necessary to turn off the master power switch. Mr Wong Kin Wa explained that the main control panel in the FS pump room had a Pump 1 Isolator switch and a Pump 2 Isolator switch, which enabled each of the two FS booster pumps to be switched off independently.

60 Mr Chung Kit Man gave an example where the FS booster pump might be activated by someone breaking a break-glass unit, even if there was no water supply.



Figure 4-13: Close up photograph of the main control panel in the FS pump room of Wang Chi House (Block H) (Pump 1 Isolator switch and Pump 2 Isolator switch circled in green)

(iii) AD Keung also testified that draining the FS tank only required turning off the pump isolator switches for the FS booster pumps and did not require switching off the master power switch. AD Keung agreed that this was basic knowledge for an RFSIC.

354. On the other hand, ISS's electrician stationed at WF Court and who is not an RFSIC, Mr Law Kwok Shui held a different understanding:

(i) Mr Law Kwok Shui understood that draining the FS tank involved three steps: switching off the upfeed pump in the pump room, draining the FS tank by loosening the handwheel of the drain valve and switching off the master power switch in the FS pump room.

(ii) Mr Law Kwok Shui believed that the master power switch in the FS pump room had to be switched off in order to prevent the FS booster pumps from running dry. Importantly, he was not aware that turning off the master power switch would also disable the FAS, nor did he know that the FS booster pumps could be switched off by the pump isolator switches on the main control panel.

355. Since Mr Law Kwok Shui is unqualified to operate FSIs, the Committee will certainly choose to accept the evidence of the FSD and Victory Fire as to the correct means of powering off the FS booster pumps.

356. Mr Law Kwok Shui admitted that, acting on his understanding of the steps required to drain the FS tank (an understanding which, on the evidence of the FSD and Victory Fire, was erroneous), he switched off the master power switches in the FS pump rooms of all eight blocks.

357. Mr Law Kwok Shui carried out the draining of the FS tanks because he received a job order from ISS requiring him to assist PC&E in draining the FS tanks:

(i) According to Mr Lee Shing Foo (ISS's carpenter), between May and August 2025, the management office issued eight job orders directing ISS works department staff to assist PC&E in draining the FS tanks.

(ii) One of the job orders was issued by Madam Lok Sin Ying, which instructed ISS works department staff to drain the FS tank at Wang Tao House (Block B) on 14 July 2025.

(iii) Given that the FS tank formed part of the FHHRS, the drainage of the FS tank should have been handled by an RFSIC, not unqualified personnel. Mr Law Kwok Shui accepted that Mr Lee Shing Foo told him that only RFSICs could operate the FS tanks, and that this accorded with his own understanding. He claimed that he asked Madam Lok Sin Ying of the management office whether it was appropriate for him to operate the FS tanks without a licence, and was simply instructed to assist PC&E. He also claimed that he had thought of asking Mr Lai Wing Lee whether the action was appropriate, but did not do so eventually.

(iv) Madam Lok Sin Ying gave a different account. Their competing accounts, roles and responsibilities will be addressed in Chapter 10.

358. After the master power switches were turned off in the FS pump rooms and the FS tanks were drained, renovation works were carried out in respect of the FS tanks as described in sub-section C9(II) above. As mentioned above, the FS tanks remained out of service on the day of the fire, as most of the FS tanks were pending conversion into temporary domestic water tanks. Had the fire not occurred, the FHHRSs

would likely have remained inoperative for a substantial period until the domestic water tanks were fully renovated.

359. There was no need for the master power switches (and with them the FASs) to remain off while the FS tanks renovations continued. Restoring the FASs required nothing more than switching on the master power switches in the FS pump rooms.

360. Although Mr Law Kwok Shui knew that the master power switches were turned off, he did not appreciate that this also turned off the FASs. Victory Fire, by contrast, discovered the position weeks before the fire and obviously understood the consequence. What Victory Fire and ISS knew – and what they did or failed to do – is the subject of a factual dispute addressed in Chapter 10.

361. The unfortunate fact remains that no one turned the master power switches back on until the day of the fire on 26 November 2025.

362. After setting out what happened to the Works at WF Court and the actual situation at the site before the fire, the Committee will then try to reconstruct what had happened on the tragic day in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 5
THE DAY OF THE FIRE

A. ORIGIN AND DISCOVERY OF THE FIRE

363. It was 26 November 2025. The weather was dry, with the relative humidity between 40% and 50%. A brisk east to south-easterly wind blew across WF Court at 14 kilometres per hour. A red fire danger warning had been issued.

364. The fire broke out between 14:30 and 14:40 hours that afternoon. The earliest indication of the fire was captured by a CCTV camera above the bicycle parking area at the rear of Wang Cheong House (Block F). From 14:33 hours onwards,[61] the footage recorded faint traces of smoke drifting from the external scaffolding into the bicycle parking area. The general direction in which the smoke drifted is illustrated by the red arrow in Figure 5-1 below.



Figure 5-1: Still image from CCTV footage captured by the camera above the bicycle parking area at the rear of Wang Cheong House (Block F) (14:33:00 hours)

61 According to the information supplied by the Police, the time stated in the surveillance footage was 42 seconds ahead of the actual time.

365. The location of the surveillance camera is shown in Figure 5- 2 below (CCTV camera #4 inside red circle).



Figure 5-2: Map showing location of the CCTV camera

366. At 14:42:18 hours, the same CCTV camera captured the first glints of light. These were burning embers dripping from the scaffolding near the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F). From 14:43:38 hours, further embers dropped with increasing frequency. By 14:44:48 hours, a small, self-sustaining fire had taken hold on the ground. The embers continued to fall until the surveillance footage cut out at 14:47:20 hours.



Figure 5-3: **Still images from CCTV footage captured by the camera above the bicycle parking area at the rear of Wang Cheong House (Block F) (14:43:00 and 14:45:30 hours)**

367. Another CCTV camera also corroborated the timing of the fire. It was located outside the access opening at the rear staircase between 5/F and 6/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F) – directly above the seat of the fire.

368. At 14:42:55 hours,[62] the CCTV footage recorded a male voice shouting "Hey, who is it who has been smoking and set these things alight?". Another worker said, "Isn't it you who is smoking?". Moments later, voices asked "Where is it?" and "Who's working in that area?".

369. Meanwhile, workers continued working and conversing. It was not until 14:46:45 hours that they finally realised the gravity of the situation. Screams were heard. By 14:48 hours, dust, smoke and flames overwhelmed the area. The video feed terminated at 14:48:03 hours. Meanwhile, the Committee heard evidence that the workers tried to use a water hose nearby (which was there for the tiling works) to try extinguish the fire. However, water was said to have stopped coming out from the hose after 20 to 30 seconds for unknown reasons.

62 The CCTV footage was corrupted during the fire resulting in audio and video feeds becoming desynchronised. The timestamps for the video feed are based on the timestamps shown on the video, whereas the timestamps for the audio feed are based on the actual playback time.



Figure 5-4: Still images from CCTV footage captured by the camera outside the rear staircase between 5/F and 6/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F) at 14:47:56 and 14:47:59 hours

370. At around 14:50 hours, Mr Yip Fai, a passerby standing at Island House Lane, discovered the fire and called 999 to report the fire. The FSD received the call by 14:51 hours. At 14:50:43 hours, Mr Yip captured the first clear view of the fire, on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F).

371. The footage showed a developed, yet localised, fire on the flat roof. In the right-hand corner of the frame, burning material could be seen dripping from the flat roof to the area outside the bicycle parking area as shown in Figures 5-1 and 5-3.

372. At 14:53 hours, Mr Yip Fai shot a second video with a wider angle of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Island House Lane. On the audio track, an observer asked in disbelief why no fire alarm could be heard.



Figure 5-5: Still images from videos captured by Mr Yip Fai at around 14:50 and 14:53 hours

373. The Committee received no other videos or photographs indicating an alternative origin of the fire. As confirmed by Dr Lee of the Government Laboratory, no other possible seat of fire has been identified (see Chapter 6). The conclusion is clear: the fire began on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F).

374. The FSD responded promptly. The first fire appliances arrived at the scene at 14:56:22 hours, five minutes and five seconds after the call was first received by the FSD at 14:51:17 hours. The firefighting operations will be detailed in Chapter 7.

B. RAPID SPREAD OF THE FIRE AT WANG CHEONG HOUSE (BLOCK F)

375. Within minutes, the localised fire erupted into a vertical conflagration. A towering pillar of flame ascended the re-entrant between Flats 4 and 5 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) with immense speed and ferocity.

376. Two further videos captured by Mr Yip Fai showed this rapid ascent. The Committee's experts analysed these videos. They determined that the vertical fire spread reached its full development by 14:59 hours. By 15:02 hours, it had already begun to decay.

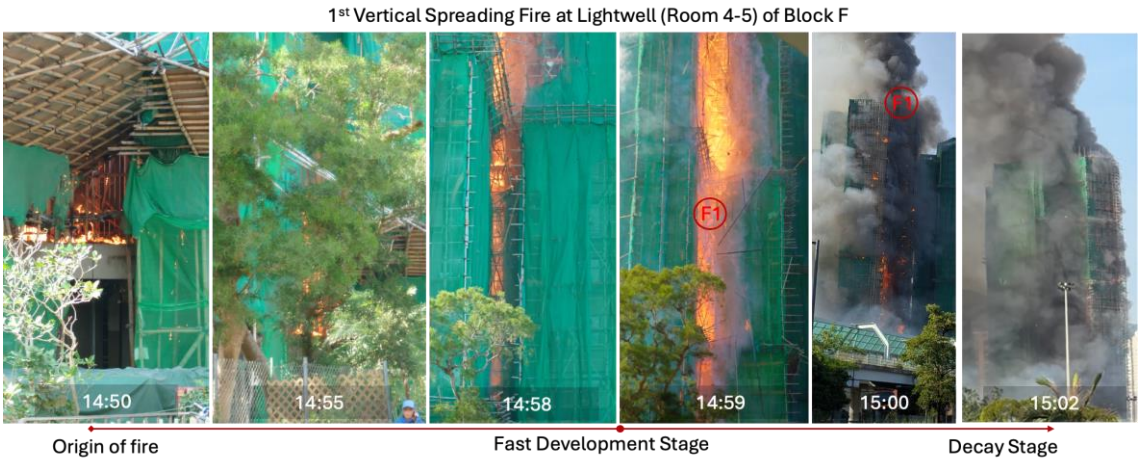


Figure 5-6: Still images from videos captured by Mr Yip Fai and other passersby, reproduced in the Committee Expert Report

377. The scaffolding in the re-entrant quickly began to disintegrate. Bamboo members and other debris started to fall to the ground at around 14:57 hours. This can be seen from the footage taken by Mr Yip Fai.



Figure 5-7: Still images from videos captured by Mr Yip Fai (14:56:58, 14:57:38 and 14:57:57 hours)

378. The evidence of SStnO Hui is that these burning articles piled up and blocked the rear exit of Wang Cheong House (Block F) facing Island House Lane.

379. At around 15:02 hours, the fire consumed a second re-entrant on Wang Cheong House (Block F) between Flats 6 and 7.



Figure 5-8: Still images from videos captured between 15:02 and 15:08 hours, reproduced in the Committee Expert Report

380. By 15:04 hours, the fire ignited the shrubbery on the open ground outside Flats 7 and 8 of Wang Cheong House (Block F). Mr Sdanni Yip, a resident of Wang Tai House (Block E), testified that the area quickly deteriorated into a sea of flames advancing from Wang Cheong House to Wang Tai House.



Figure 5-9: Still image from a video taken by Mr Yip Fai (15:04:35 hours)

381. The conflagration continued to spread. By 15:09 hours, a third re-entrant fire erupted between Flats 1 and 8 of Wang Cheong House (Block F). As illustrated in Figures 5-6, 5-8 and 5-10, these pillars of flame developed sequentially in a clockwise direction, marked chronologically F1, F2 and F3 respectively.

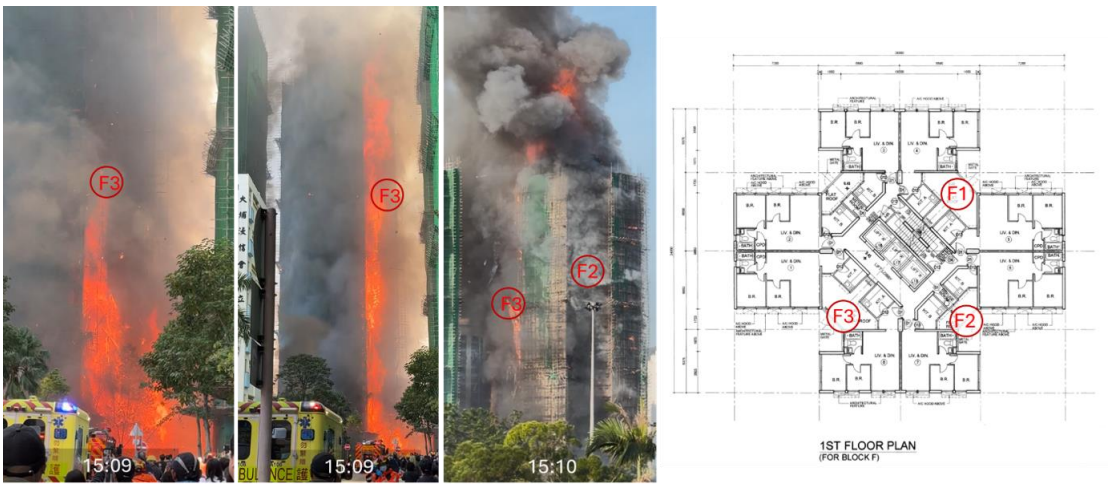


Figure 5-10: Still images from videos of the third re-entrant fire at Wang Cheong House (Block F), reproduced in the Committee Expert Report

382. By about 15:05 hours, collapsed burning bamboo obstructed the front entrance of Wang Cheong House (Block F), according to the IFITF's findings. Still images from 15:09 hours confirm that the area outside the entrance had quickly become a massive inferno (see Figure 5-10 above).[63]

383. The front entrance and rear exit were the only means of escape from Wang Cheong House (Block F). By 15:05 hours, both routes were obstructed by burning debris on the ground. Escaping residents faced an impossible barrier less than 15 minutes after the first emergency call to report the fire.

384. These rapid towering pillars of flames were no isolated incident. They occurred a total of 12 times along the re-entrants at WF Court. The Committee's expert, Professor Usmani, characterised the velocity of the spread as unprecedented in the history of major building fires. One of the re-entrant fires reached a maximum velocity of 10 m per second. By contrast, the Grenfell Tower fire spread at a rate of approximately 8 m per minute.

C. SPREAD OF THE FIRE TO OTHER BLOCKS

C1. Wang Tai House (Block E)

385. Within minutes of the first emergency call, the fire spread westward to Wang Tai House (Block E), the closest neighbouring block to the west. A CCTV camera captured smoking debris falling on the roof of Wang Tai House as early as 14:58 hours.

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63 According to Mr Tsang Ka Lok, a construction worker working outside Flat 1607 of Wang Chi House (Block H) at the time, a black burning object also landed on the construction waste collection point in the roundabout at around this time, setting it alight.



Figure 5-11: Still image from CCTV footage on the roof of Wang Tai House (Block E) (14:58:39 hours)

386. SStnO Hui also observed specks of flame on the scaffolding on the east façade of Wang Tai House (Block E) at around 15:00 hours.

387. The open ground between the front entrances of Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Cheong House (Block F) was soon well alight. By 15:11 hours, a CCTV camera positioned at the entrance captured bright flames reflecting off the metal gate. Between 15:11 and 15:18 hours, haze and smoke gradually filled the open area.[64]



Figure 5-12: Still image from CCTV footage outside the front entrance of Wang Tai House (Block E) (15:09:11 and 15:16:03 hours)

64 The timestamps in the surveillance footage were approximately two minutes behind reference time.

388. Fire pillars rapidly ascended Wang Tai House's (Block E) re-entrants in a clockwise direction. At 15:16 hours, the first pillar of flame engulfed the re-entrant between Flats 1 and 8. Just a minute later, a second erupted between Flats 2 and 3. By 15:30 hours, a third column of flames took hold between Flats 4 and 5.



Figure 5-13: Still images from videos of the re-entrant fires at Wang Tai House (Block E), reproduced in the Committee Expert Report

389. By 15:18 hours[65], bamboo scaffolding collapsed near the front entrance of Wang Tai House (Block E), as observed from a CCTV camera at the bicycle parking area.

65 The timestamp in this surveillance footage was approximately one minute behind reference time.



Figure 5-14: Still image from CCTV footage inside the bicycle parking area of Wang Tai House (Block E) (15:17:02 hours)

390. Flames continued to consume the area outside the front entrance of Wang Tai House (Block E). The front entrance was completely blocked by flames at around 15:21 hours, at which time the CCTV footage terminated.



Figure 5-15: Still image from CCTV footage outside the front entrance of Wang Tai House (Block E) (15:19:17 hours)[66]

66 The time shown in the footage was approximately two minutes behind reference time.

391. According to the IFITF, the front entrance and rear exit of Wang Tai House (Block E) were obstructed by burning debris at 15:20 and 15:30 hours respectively. This severely compromised the evacuation of residents.

C2. Wang Shing House (Block G)

392. The fire soon impacted a third building. By approximately 15:09 hours, a video captured by a passerby provided the first video evidence of fire at Wang Shing House (Block G). The footage showed parts of the scaffolding ablaze along the south façade of the building.



Figure 5-16: Still image from video footage of Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Cheong House (Block F) captured outside Wang Kin House (Block D) at around 15:09 hours

393. Witness testimony indicated that the fire might have reached Wang Shing House (Block G) earlier than the video evidence suggested. As early as 15:00 hours, Mr Wong Wai Sum (witness no 22) observed burning fragments of scaffolding nets drifting from Wang Cheong House (Block F) and igniting flames on Wang Shing House (Block G). This is corroborated by Madam Tse Yuk Wa and Mr Sdanni Yip who both testified to seeing flaming debris and scaffolding nets flying from Wang Cheong House and landing on Wang Shing House by 15:05 hours.

394. Frontline observations from the FSD personnel confirmed that the fire had spread to Wang Shing House (Block G) no later than 15:20 hours. Testifying for the IFITF, DCFO Lam verified that this observation represented the latest time by which the fire had spread.

395. At Wang Shing House (Block G), rapid vertical spread of the fire only occurred much later at around 16:22 hours.

C3. Other blocks

396. The first fragments of flaming debris began to fall on the roof of Wang Sun House (Block C) at 15:12 hours. At around 15:25 hours, specks of flame were seen on the scaffolding of Wang Sun House.



Figure 5-17: Still image taken from CCTV footage on the roof of Wang Sun House (Block C) (15:12:21 hours)



Figure 5-18: Still image taken from video footage captured at Kwong Fuk Estate looking towards Wang Sun House (Block C) at around 15:25 hours

397. Consistently, frontline observations from the FSD personnel confirmed that the fire had spread to Wang Sun House (Block C) no later than 15:25 hours.

398. The first rapid re-entrant fire at Wang Sun House (Block C) occurred around half an hour later between Flats 2 and 3. Video footage captured by eyewitnesses at 16:00 hours showed that the flame climbed the entire 31-storey height of the building within the span of approximately 1.5 minutes.

399. Further pillars of flame went up Wang Sun House (Block C) re-entrants at 16:36 hours (between Flats 1 and 8) and 16:43 hours (between Flats 4 and 5).

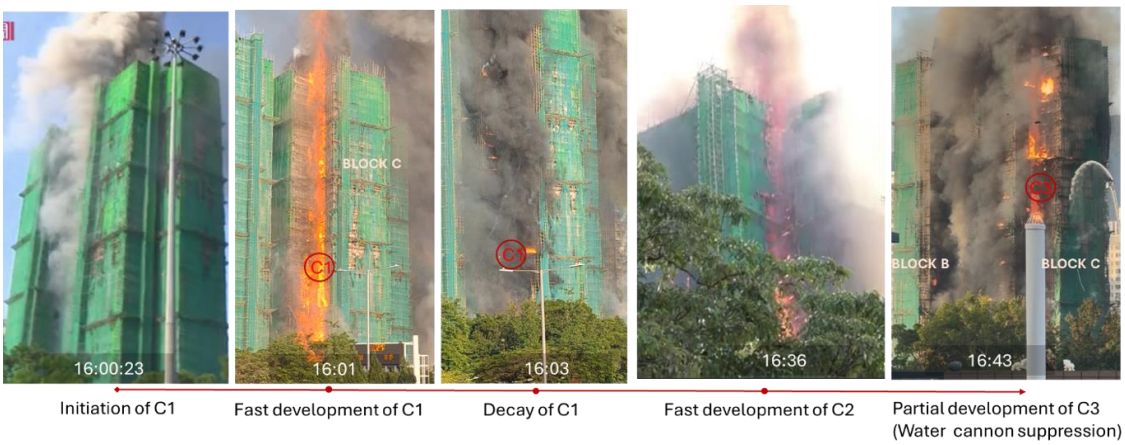


Figure 5-19: Still images taken from video footage captured outside Wang Sun House (Block C), reproduced in the Committee Expert Report

400. At around 16:45 hours, bamboo scaffolding from Wang Sun House (Block C) collapsed onto the ground below.[67]

67 Statement of Fireman Li King Chung given to the Police on 10 April 2026, para 7.

401. As to the spread of fire to Wang Kin House (Block D):

(i) Mr Wong Shing Kin (witness no 21), a resident of Flat 2108, testified that the scaffolding of Wang Kin House (Block D) first caught fire at around 15:15 hours. He saw flames on multiple parts of the scaffolding nets outside the kitchen window of his neighbour's flat, each measuring approximately 10 cm by 10 cm.

(ii) A resident of Kwong Lai House at the neighbouring Kwong Fuk Estate captured the first video evidence of the spread of fire to Wang Kin House (Block D) at around 15:20 hours. In the footage, specks of flame appeared on the scaffolding of the west façade of Wang Kin House.



Figure 5-20: Still image taken from video footage captured at Kwong Fuk Estate looking towards Wang Kin House (Block D)

(iii) Frontline observations from the FSD personnel confirmed that the fire had spread to Wang Kin House (Block D) no later than 15:25 hours.

402. No vertical fire spread occurred at Wang Kin House (Block D) despite multiple points of ignition on the scaffolding. Based on the results of a CFD simulation of the effect of wind on the fire spread, the IFITF observed that a recirculation zone[68] may have formed around the building which extended the travel distance of embers, allowing them to cool before reaching Wang Kin House and reducing the risk of ignition. This accounts for why Wang Kin House was largely spared from fire damage, as detailed further below.

403. As to Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Yan House (Block A):

(i) Frontline personnel from the FSD observed that the fire first spread to these buildings no later than 15:39 and 16:04 hours respectively.

(ii) A rapid vertical fire engulfed the re-entrant between Flats 2 and 3 of Wang Tao House (Block B) at 16:11 hours. This re-entrant was immediately opposite the re-entrant between Flats 2 and 3 of Wang Sun House (Block C) which experienced a vertical fire at around 16:01 hours, just 10 minutes earlier.

(iii) The final re-entrant fire took place much later at 18:32 hours, in the re-entrant between Flats 2 and 3 of Wang Yan House (Block A).

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68 A recirculation zone is a region where the fluid velocity locally reverses direction and forms a circulating loop. Instead of moving downstream, the flow rolls back upstream and creates a vortex-like structure.



Figure 5-21: Still images taken from video footage of fire at Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Yan House (Block A), reproduced in the Committee Expert Report

404. The fire burned overnight. It spread into and completely consumed many flats, common corridors and staircases across the seven blocks affected by the fire. The image at Figure 5-22, taken from livestream coverage of the fire, showed many flats ablaze from their interior as at 19:00 hours on 26 November 2025.

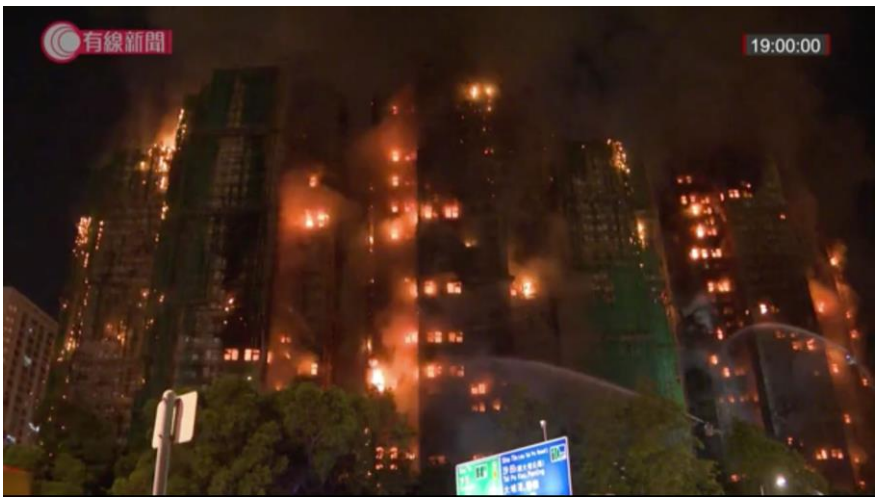


Figure 5-22: Still image taken from i-Cable news footage at 19:00:00 hours

405. Firefighting operations were declared over at 10:18 hours on 28 November 2025, over 43 hours after the initial attendance. The firefighting response will be addressed in Chapter 7.

C4. Observations About the External Spread of the Fire

406. A few overarching observations can be made about the spread of the fire.

407. First, the fire spread most rapidly through vertical pillars of flame that ascended the re-entrants at an unprecedented speed. There were 12 such occurrences across six blocks. Among these, 11 fully-fledged re-entrant fires occurred within a period of less than two hours from 14:58 to 16:43 hours. Wang Kin House (Block D) was affected by the fire, but no re-entrant fire occurred. Wang Chi House (Block H) remained unaffected by the fire.



(F) 1st Re-entrant fire of Block F
Peak time of re-entrant fire

Figure 5-23: Diagram illustrating vertical fires in WF Court, taken from Committee Experts' Presentation on 25 June 2026

408. Second, the fire spread from block to block primarily through flying embers and airborne burning debris (such as fragments of scaffolding nets, bamboo and other construction materials). Carried by the wind, these embers travelled significant distances and ignited combustible materials, including safety nets, on the exteriors of other blocks. This mechanism is amply supported by CCTV footage, video footage taken by residents and witness testimony.

409. Third, the wind conditions that day – east to south-easterly winds at around 14 km/h – played a role in the development of the fire. Wang Chi House (Block H), which was far to the north of Wang Cheong House (Block F), remained entirely unaffected by the fire. The IFITF's simulation based on a CFD model demonstrated that the wind did not carry embers towards Wang Chi House that day. Wang Kin House (Block D), which found itself within a recirculation zone between Wang Sun House (Block C) and Wang Tai House (Block E), also suffered relatively minimal fire damage.

D. CONDITIONS INSIDE THE BLOCKS AND MEANS OF ESCAPE

D1. Internal conditions within Wang Cheong House (Block F)

410. There is a significant correlation between the rapid re-entrant fires and the extent of building interior damage. Among the 562 units in WF Court that sustained severe or extremely severe fire damage, 518 units (92%) were located adjacent to re-entrants where rapid fire spread was observed.

411. Conditions in the lift lobby corridors were also closely associated with the rapid fire spread along re-entrants connected to the corridors. It is therefore reasonable to infer that staircases connected to re-entrants engulfed by pillars of flames would also have been swiftly penetrated by smoke and heat. This inference is corroborated by the testimony of occupants who managed to escape the fire.

412. Occupants of Wang Cheong House (Block F) testified to the very limited window available to escape. Smoke filled individual flats, common corridors and staircases within minutes of the discovery of the fire.

(i) By 14:59 hours, the rapid vertical fire within the east re-entrant outside Flats 4 and 5 had become fully developed. Crucially, this re-entrant was directly connected to the staircases of Wang Cheong House (Block F).

(ii) Furthermore, the escape routes on the G/F were blocked by falling debris by 15:05 hours.

413. Madam Chung Sui Ha, the building attendant on duty at Wang Cheong House (Block F), stated that she was first alerted to the fire by an individual who was neither a resident of Wang Cheong House nor a construction worker wearing a PC&E uniform. When she arrived at the rear of the block, she saw small flames on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105. She then notified the management office of the fire via walkie-talkie.

414. By cross-referencing Madam Chung Sui Ha's testimony with the footage captured by Mr Yip Fai and the evidence of Madam Lok Sin Ying, who called 999 at 14:52 hours shortly after receiving Madam Chung's report, it can be inferred that Madam Chung was first informed of the fire at around 14:50 hours.

415. Upon discovering the fire, Madam Chung Sui Ha then returned to Wang Cheong House (Block F) to activate the fire alarms. She went up to 1/F as there was no break-glass call point at the lobby, but could not activate the alarm. She then went up to 3/F to access the break-glass call point there, but was similarly unsuccessful. On her way up, the staircases were still relatively smoke-free, but she could hear crackling noises and see flames outside the window. By the time she reached 3/F, smoke had begun to fill the staircases from higher floors, presumably from the access openings on the 5/F staircase based on evidence now known. She therefore returned to the lobby where she reported the situation to Madam Cheng Tsz Ying. She continued to evacuate residents until the lobby became uninhabitable due to the fire having already spread to the area outside the front entrance. This would have been around 15:05 hours.

416. Madam Tse Yuk Wa, a resident of Flat 204 (directly above the seat of the fire), testified that smoke began penetrating through her kitchen window during the initial stages of the fire. Based on the photographs she took at the time, this occurred at around 14:53 hours. When Madam Tse opened her front door to clear the smoke in her flat, she observed that the common corridor was becoming hazy. When she evacuated her flat at around 15:00 hours, the staircase was already smoke-logged, large flames were visible through the window and the walls were radiating heat. By the time she left the building, smoke was billowing from the lobby into the surrounding area.



Figure 5-24: Still images from footage taken by Madam Tse Yuk Wa in Flat 204 at 14:53 hours

417. Mr Chan Chuen Joe ("Mr Joe Chan") (witness no 7), a resident of Flat 605, explained that he first became aware of the fire through the smell of smoke at around 14:51 hours. He immediately called the management office to inform them of the situation. At around 14:56 hours, he observed his kitchen filling with smoke within a span of one to two minutes, transitioning from white smoke to dark smoke. There was some smoke in the corridor but noticeably less smoke than in his flat. He evacuated via the staircase.

418. Madam Wong Ka Yuen (witness no 5), a resident of Flat 1005, testified that, at around 14:50 hours, she heard workers yelling outside her flat. When she looked out her window, she saw smoke but no flames outside. Looking into the corridor, she could smell smoke but the corridor was still clear. She left the flat and reached the G/F by staircase

at around 14:55 hours. Inside the staircase, she saw that the window was already glowing red.

419. Madam Ko Yee Lui, a resident of Flat 2405, stated that the television signal in her flat was abruptly lost at around 14:53 hours. She noticed the smell of smoke when she opened the window in her living room at around 14:55 hours but could not see any smoke or flames outside. Concurrently, smoke began seeping into her flat through the exhaust vent. Smoke had begun to fill the common corridor. Upon attempting to use the staircases, she found them heavily logged with white smoke, leaving her no alternative but to escape via the lift. She reached the G/F by 14:57 hours, observing a plume of smoke rising above Wang Cheong House (Block F).



Figure 5-25: Photo taken by Madam Ko Yee Lui outside Wang Cheong House (Block F) at 15:03 hours

420. The rapid infiltration of smoke into the staircases is further supported by the written statement of Mr Li Ka Ching, a tiling worker who was working in the water tanks on the rooftop of Wang Cheong House (Block F). He noticed that the temporary lighting inside the water tanks short-circuited at around 14:50 hours. Roughly a minute later, he detected the smell of burning material and saw white smoke drifting above the water tanks, prompting him to evacuate. By then, the staircases were already heavily smoke-logged, with visibility reduced to 30% to 40%. Conditions within the stairwell were so poor that, when he reached the 14/F at around 14:57 hours, he was forced to exit the staircase briefly to catch his breath.

421. According to Mr Li Ka Ching, during the approximately 30 seconds he spent on the 14/F, the staircase became engulfed in black smoke and thus inaccessible. Observing that the lifts were still operational, he decided to use the lift instead and exited Wang Cheong House (Block F) at 15:01 hours.

422. Ultimately, few occupants were able to evacuate successfully from Wang Cheong House (Block F). Madam Tse Yuk Wa testified that, apart from an elderly woman whom she met at the staircase landing of 1/F, she did not encounter anyone else in the staircase or the G/F lobby. Madam Ko Yee Lui also testified that she did not encounter anyone when taking the lift to the G/F. Mr Joe Chan met another resident escaping by stairs on his way down, but stated that there were few people around when he arrived at the G/F lobby and he only counted fewer than 10 people escaping from Wang Cheong House. The overwhelming majority were trapped inside the block by the rapid spread of smoke and fire.

423. Mr Chau Chi Wai, a resident of Flat 207, testified that he first noticed the fire shortly before 15:00 hours when a window in his unit began glowing red and loud crackling noises emanated from outside his flat. This was explicable as his flat was adjacent to the second re-entrant engulfed in

a pillar of flames. After a while, the foam board covering the window in his master bedroom caught fire and the glass window shattered. He attempted to extinguish the fire with a showerhead, but ultimately had to flee. By the time he and his wife left their flat, the common corridor was smoke-logged to the point of being unbearable. The staircase closest to their flat was also impassable. They were rescued by their neighbour, Mr Li Cheuk Lim, who sheltered them in his flat (Flat 203) until they were finally rescued by firefighters (at around 17:00 hours).

424. Madam Huang Zulian and Mr Yiu Shun Yau (witness no 14), exterior wall cleaners who were working outside Flat 2703 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) at the time, testified that they heard workers shouting "Fire!" and went over to the source of the noise near Flat 4 to investigate. They detected the smell of smoke and saw thick smoke rising up the re-entrant. They decided to escape by climbing up the scaffolding to the rooftop. When they reached the rooftop, they saw thick flames and smoke at the re-entrant between Flats 4 and 5. They tried opening the door to the staircase but it had been consumed by black smoke and was inaccessible. They therefore stayed on the roof to await rescue, which took place the next day.

425. The Committee has also heard tragic evidence from family members of deceased residents. Some testified as to the deteriorating conditions within Wang Cheong House (Block F) in the early stages of the fire. It is apparent that individual units began to be infiltrated by smoke as early as 15:00 hours.

426. Madam Lo Hiu Kei's late mother, Madam Lo Ying who lived at Flat 808, messaged the family's WhatsApp group at 15:02 hours to inform them of the fire. Upon seeing the message one minute later, Madam Lo Hiu Kei called her mother, who stated that the common corridor was filled with smoke. Her mother added that smoke continued to

infiltrate the flat despite her attempts to seal the door with towels. Madam Lo Hiu Kei spoke with her mother for around five minutes. Towards the end of the call, her mother told her and her brother to live a good life, after which the line abruptly disconnected.

427. Mr So Hiu Fung's (witness no 19) late parents, Mr So Yan Yip and Madam Tsang Yuk May, resided in Flat 2701. He testified that his mother called him at around 15:07 hours. She stated that their flat was filled with smoke, that she would try to head downstairs, and that she was about to die. Those were the last words Mr So Hiu Fung heard from his mother, though the call lasted for another one hour and 49 minutes until around 17:00 hours, when the line disconnected. Mr So Hiu Fung immediately rushed to WF Court from work and repeatedly sought assistance from FSD personnel to no avail. Call records provided by the Police indicated the late Madam Tsang had called 999 at 15:00 hours to report that the scaffolding outside her flat was on fire and that her flat was filled with smoke.

428. Mr Lee Kwok Hung (witness no 48) gave evidence regarding the last moments of his late mother (Madam Tam) and her domestic helpers, Madam Dina-Martiana and Madam Darwati, who resided at Flat 2603. His family was first alerted to the fire when Mr Lee's sister received a call from Madam Tam's domestic helpers. Mr Lee's sister had in fact just visited Madam Tam and had only left the flat at around 14:45 hours. At around 15:00 hours, Mr Lee himself learnt of the fire through a residents' WhatsApp group. Upon learning of the fire, he checked footage from the surveillance camera installed in Madam Tam's flat and saw that it was already smoke-logged and that his mother and the two domestic helpers were nowhere to be seen. He then repeatedly called Madam Dina-Martiana but was only able to get through at 15:15 hours, when he heard Madam Dina-Martiana frantically screaming but was unable to communicate with her. The call disconnected after 48 seconds.

429. Mr Lee Kwok Hung subsequently retrieved footage from the surveillance camera within Flat 2603. The footage from the day of the fire showed that Madam Dina-Martiana and Madam Darwati first discovered the fire at around 14:57 hours. They hurriedly dressed Madam Tam and moved her by wheelchair from the flat at 14:59 hours into a visibly smoke-logged corridor. They subsequently sought refuge in Flat 2608 where their remains were discovered the next morning.

430. The surveillance camera inside Flat 2603 captured the flat becoming enveloped in smoke within less than one minute after 14:59 hours, which only cleared at approximately 23:00 hours.





Figure 5-26: Still images from CCTV footage inside Flat 2603

431. The internal conditions within Wang Cheong House (Block F) were also evidenced by 999 call recordings and other video footage received by the Committee.

(i) One of the 999 calls heard by the Committee was placed by a domestic helper trapped in Flat 502 at 15:00 hours. She stated that her flat had been filled with and completely darkened by the smoke.

(ii) Another call was placed by a resident of Flat 1706 at 15:04 hours. The caller mentioned that smoke had blocked out the staircase lighting entirely and was entering her flat through the gaps in her front door.

(iii) Finally, footage captured by a door camera on 15/F showed the corridor filling completely with smoke within a span of six minutes between 14:54 and 15:00 hours.



Figure 5-27: Still images taken from CCTV footage on 15/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F) at 14:54:15 and 15:00:23 hours, reproduced by The Collective

432. Given the rapid spread of fire and smoke within Wang Cheong House (Block F), few were able to escape. Many of those who were trapped inside perished in the smoke and fire. Only a few were rescued by firefighters. Based on questionnaires distributed by the Police to residents shortly after the fire, approximately 20 individuals were able to evacuate from Wang Cheong House unassisted, with no resident from above 10/F able to evacuate via the staircases. 32 individuals were rescued from Wang Cheong House by the FSD.

D2. Internal conditions within Wang Tai House (Block E)

433. Wang Tai House (Block E) similarly experienced a rapid deterioration in tenable conditions once the fire spread. Nevertheless, compared to Wang Cheong House (Block F), residents had relatively more time to escape.

434. Mr Sdanni Yip, a resident of Flat 1701, testified that he was first alerted to the fire by his late wife, Madam Pak Shui Lin, who had detected a strong burning smell. They then opened their window facing Wang Cheong House (Block F), where they observed large volumes of smoke. He went downstairs to assess the situation at around 15:05 hours and exited the building around 15:07 hours. CCTV footage capturing his departure confirms that the 17/F corridor was still clear at that time.



Figure 5-28: Still image taken from CCTV footage inside lift of Wang Tai House (Block E) showing conditions of 17/F corridor (15:03:49 hours)

435. Madam Lam Yin Ming (witness no 17), a resident of Flat 1703, testified that she first heard a commotion outside her flat at around 14:55 hours. When she opened the door, she encountered Madam Pak Shui Lin who informed her of the fire at Wang Cheong House (Block F) and advised her to close the windows. Upon returning to her flat, she detected a faint odour of smoke through her window. However, her view was obstructed by the scaffolding, prompting her to go downstairs to investigate. Shortly thereafter, hearing Madam Pak's voice in the corridor again, she reopened the door and was advised to pack her belongings. She subsequently escaped via the staircase, leaving the building at 15:12 hours.

436. Madam Pak Shui Lin remained in the building to continue alerting residents to the fire. Although she tragically perished, her heroic actions ultimately saved several lives.

437. Madam Lam Yin Ming also testified that, as she headed downstairs, she did not fully believe there was a fire, as she saw few others evacuating alongside her. There was virtually no smell of smoke inside the building, and the fire alarm had not activated. It was only when she saw the flames at Wang Cheong House (Block F) that she realised the severity of the fire.

438. The situation deteriorated very rapidly after Madam Lam Yin Ming left the building at 15:12 hours. Smoke began to infiltrate the lift lobby corridors at Wang Tai House (Block E) just four minutes later, at approximately 15:16 hours.

(i) As mentioned above, the first pillar of fire at Wang Tai House (Block E) developed in the re-entrant between Flats 1 and 8 at 15:16 hours. This re-entrant was connected to the lift lobby corridors of each floor, which had openable windows.

(ii) Smoke entered the corridors through these openable windows, with immediate and devastating consequences for those who remained inside Wang Tai House (Block E).

439. Footage taken in the lift lobby on 31/F shortly before 15:17 hours [69] showed black smoke infiltrating the common corridor through an open window opposite the lifts.



Figure 5-29: Video footage of the lift lobby window at 31/F Wang Tai House (Block E), uploaded by Orange News

69 The time of the footage can be identified by cross-referencing the individuals shown in the footage with surveillance footage from the CCTV cameras in the lifts.

440. Surveillance footage from CCTV cameras installed inside the lifts of Wang Tai House (Block E) also showed that the corridors across many floors became smoke-logged by around 15:19 hours. The following photographs are side-by-side comparisons of the conditions in the corridors of various floors between 15:13 and 15:20 hours:

(i) Lift lobby on G/F (15:17 and 15:20 hours):[70]



Figure 5-30: Still images taken from CCTV footage inside lift of Wang Tai House (Block E) showing conditions of G/F lobby (15:14:50, 15:18:19, 15:18:49 hours)

70 The timestamps recorded by the CCTV camera were two minutes behind reference time.

(ii) Lift lobby corridor on 18/F (15:16 and 15:19 hours):



Figure 5-31: Still images taken from CCTV footage inside lift of Wang Tai House (Block E) showing conditions of 18/F corridor (15:14:02, 15:17:24 hours)

(iii) Lift lobby corridor on 27/F (15:17 and 15:20 hours)



Figure 5-32: Still images taken from CCTV footage inside lift of Wang Tai House (Block E) showing conditions of 27/F corridor (15:15:31, 15:18:04 hours)

441. By 15:21 hours, the common corridors on multiple floors were clearly untenable, as the corridors and the lifts themselves became smoke-logged.

(i) Lift lobby corridor on 23/F (15:21 hours):



Figure 5-33: Still image taken from CCTV footage inside lift of Wang Tai House (Block E) showing conditions of 23/F corridor (15:19:25 hours)

(ii) Lift lobby corridor on 24/F (15:21 hours):



Figure 5-34: Still image taken from CCTV footage inside lift of Wang Tai House (Block E) showing conditions of 24/F corridor (15:19:29 hours)

442. This is consistent with footage from surveillance cameras installed by residents. The door camera installed at Flat 2407 showed the corridor smoke-logged at 15:13 hours and thick smoke infiltrating the flat at 15:18 hours.



Figure 5-35: Still images taken from CCTV footage in Flat 2407 of Wang Tai House (Block E) (15:13:45 and 15:18:30 hours)

443. Another camera inside Flat 2906 showed the smoke infiltrating the flat through the front door at 15:16 hours. By 15:30 hours, the flat had been completely enveloped in smoke.



Figure 5-36: Still image taken from CCTV footage in Flat 2906 of Wang Tai House (Block E) (15:16:23 hours)

444. Following the infiltration of smoke into the lift lobby corridors, the staircases and ground exits at Wang Tai House (Block E) became untenable by no later than 15:30 hours. According to the IFITF:

(i) The front entrance and rear exit at Wang Tai House (Block E) were obstructed by burning debris by around 15:20 and 15:30 hours respectively.

(ii) By 15:30 hours, the third pillar of flames engulfed the west re-entrant between Flats 4 and 5. This re-entrant was directly connected to the staircases of Wang Tai House (Block E).

445. Nevertheless, there were various flats and other areas which remained tenable for extended periods, though not in all cases long enough for firefighters to effect rescues.

(i) Mr Cheung Chi Lim George ("Mr George Cheung") (witness no 8), a resident of Flat 1006, testified that he and his wife were resting at home when they learned of the fire via a WhatsApp message. When he looked out from his flat, he saw the garbage collection point in the roundabout on fire, and observed fire engines with their lights flashing but without sirens. Shortly thereafter, the scaffolding outside his flat and the neighbouring flats caught fire, which he attempted to extinguish. He and his wife decided to leave their flat at around 15:16 hours and proceeded to the staircases. The doorbell camera shows the corridor was clear as at 15:16 hours when Mr Cheung exited the flat. They then opened the fire doors to find both stairwells filled with smoke and inaccessible. They retreated into their flat together with their neighbour at 15:17 hours. By that time,

the common corridor had filled with smoke, presumably infiltrating from the window opposite the lift lobby.



Figure 5-37: Still images taken from CCTV footage in Flat 1006 of Wang Tai House (Block E) at 15:16:10 and 15:17:12 hours

(ii) While they awaited rescue within their flat, smoke infiltrated the living room and kitchen, forcing them to retreat into the toilet and bedroom. They were finally rescued at around 20:00 hours. When firefighters breached the door, a wave of radiant heat swept into the room. While they were carried down the stairs by the firefighters, hot water rushed down the stairwells and the railings were scalding hot.

(iii) Madam Sin Sin Hing, a resident of Flat 1406, testified that when she was preparing to leave her flat at around 15:00 hours, she saw wisps of black smoke in the common corridor. She therefore decided to stay in her flat and await rescue. Smoke continued to infiltrate her flat through the gaps in the door frame. She turned on the fan to direct the smoke out of a window. During this period, she noticed that the paint on her wall had begun to crack due to the

intense heat from the adjacent flat. When she was finally rescued by firefighters, the corridor was entirely dark and very hot. She observed a neighbouring flat had been completely burnt out, with a sizeable hole in the front door.

(iv) Mr Lee Chun Ho (witness no 43), a resident of Flat 1907, gave evidence regarding the ordeal faced by his mother Madam Yip Pik Yi, his elder brother Mr Lee Chun Man, his niece Lee Yan Wing and their domestic helper Madam Erawati – all of whom tragically perished in the fire. He first called his mother at approximately 16:00 hours, at which time she informed him that their flat had filled with dense smoke. Mr Lee Chun Ho and other family members subsequently called Madam Yip once every 15 minutes, during which calls she noted that there was no electricity and water supply to her unit. In one video call, Mr Lee Chun Ho saw his brother patting their mother to keep her awake in a dark flat. In his final call with his mother at approximately 21:30 hours, he heard their cries for assistance and witnessed his brother collapse on screen. Throughout this period, Mr Lee Chun Ho had repeatedly requested assistance from firefighters and police on-site, but was informed that firefighters were unable to go beyond 14/F owing to the intensity of the fire at the material time.

(v) The Committee also received written evidence from Madam Hon Yuen Ling Florence, who attended a gathering of friends at Flat 3008 with Mr Cheng Hoi Yeung, Madam Yam Ting and Madam Yam Kuen on the day of the fire. The four individuals discovered the fire when they observed large volumes of smoke rising along the exterior of the building. They called the management office to enquire

about the smoke, and were informed that there was no cause for concern as the fire was at Wang Cheong House (Block F) and that it was safe to remain in their flat. Around five minutes later, flames appeared outside their unit and smoke began to infiltrate the flat through the kitchen window. They therefore decided to leave the premises.

(vi) Upon reaching the staircase, they observed dense smoke and sparks ascending from lower floors, prompting them to switch to the other staircase, which was dark but tenable. Madam Hon Yuen Ling Florence and Mr Cheng Hoi Yeung reached the rooftop and were eventually rescued at around 02:00 hours the following morning. In this process, they became separated from Madam Yam Ting and Madam Yam Kuen, who tragically succumbed to the fire.

D3. Internal conditions within Wang Kin House (Block D)

446. Wang Kin House (Block D) remained relatively smoke-free and was tenable for a significantly longer period of time. As mentioned above, Wang Kin House did not experience any vertical fire spread and sustained minimal internal fire damage.

447. Mr Wong Wai Sum, a resident of Flat 1807, was first alerted to the fire by his wife, who heard loud noises and smelled smoke at around 15:00 hours. When they opened their living room window to investigate, they saw flames on Wang Shing House (Block G) and large amounts of smoke at Wang Cheong House (Block F). They both went downstairs by lift and left the building at around 15:10 hours. He stated that Wang Kin House (Block D) was unaffected by the fire at the time.

448. Other residents only became aware of the severity of the situation significantly later, when flames reached Wang Kin House (Block D).

449. Mr Man Ka Chun (witness no 11), a resident of Flat 3003, testified that he first detected the smell of smoke between around 15:05 and 15:10 hours, after which he heard sirens from fire appliances and noticed the scaffolding nets burning outside his flat. When he first opened his front door, he did not observe any smoke, and the stairwell was still free of smoke when he entered it. Upon reaching lower floors, however, he detected wisps of white smoke and saw visible flames outside the staircase windows. As he descended the building, he stopped at each floor to alert other residents to the fire. During this period, the common corridors remained free of smoke and flame. He reached the G/F lift lobby at around 15:40 hours.

450. Mr Wong Shing Kin, a resident of Flat 2108, testified that he first noticed loud noises followed by smoke at around 15:14 hours. He attempted to look out of his window to investigate the source of the disturbance but was unable to see any signs of the fire. A minute or two later, his neighbour, Madam Wong of Flat 2107, informed him that there were flames that were approximately 10 cm wide by 10 cm high outside her kitchen. They then attempted to extinguish the flames but were unsuccessful in operating the FHHRS. They also exhausted the portable fire extinguishers on their floor. Upon observing that the flames had spread to adjacent units, he decided to evacuate via the staircase. He left his flat at around 16:10 hours. According to his evidence, the stairwell was generally clear at that time, though by the time he left the scene, he realised that his face mask had been blackened by soot.

D4. Internal conditions within Wang Sun House (Block C)

451. The evidence indicates that the staircases in Wang Sun House (Block C) remained accessible until at least 15:22 hours, at which point the video feeds from the CCTV cameras terminated.

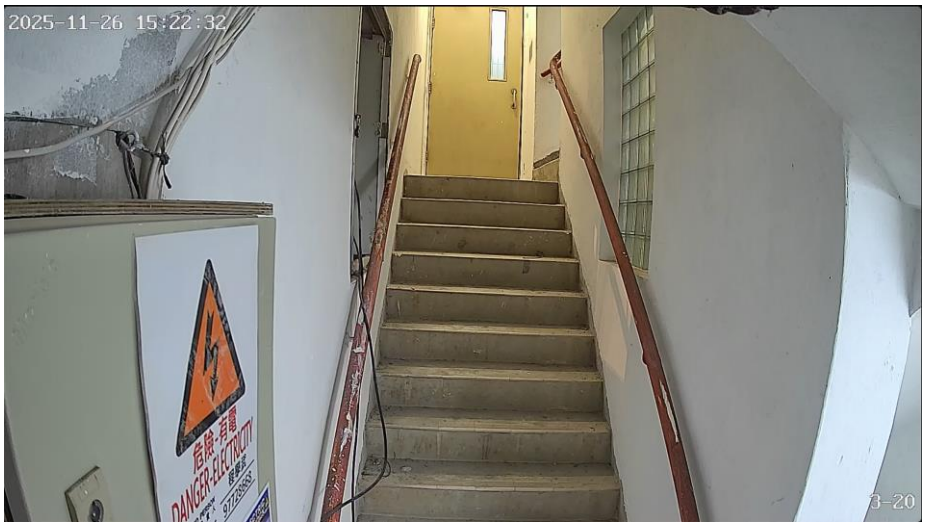


Figure 5-38: Still image taken from CCTV footage inside staircase of Wang Sun House (Block C) (15:22:32 hours)

452. Madam Tsang Wai Tai, a resident of Flat 104, gave evidence to the Police that she learnt of the fire and went down to the lobby to investigate at around 15:11 hours. She then went back up to collect her valuables at around 15:23 hours, and heard the fire alarms activate while she was packing her belongings. She safely exited the building before 15:35 hours.

453. Similarly, Mr Lee Kai Man, a resident of Flat 306, gave evidence to the Police that he evacuated the building upon learning of the fire from television. The fire alarms activated as he left his flat. He did not notice any smoke in the corridors or staircases during his escape.

454. Finally, Madam Ngai Nai Kim, a resident of Flat 701, gave evidence to the Police that she was observing the fire outside the lobby when she saw flames approaching from Wang Cheong House (Block F). She attempted to call her husband at 15:23 hours but was unable to reach him. She therefore returned to her flat via the staircases to alert her husband, and safely left the building with him.

455. These accounts suggest that common corridors on multiple floors and the staircases continued to remain smoke-free for some period after 15:22 hours.

456. By 15:45 hours, however, the common corridors on multiple floors had already become smoke-logged.

457. According to the evidence from the FSD, at approximately 15:45 hours, Station Officer ("StnO") Ma Man Ho, Fireman Fung Ka Wing and Fireman Ko Tsz Chun Felix took the lift up to 10/F with a view to deploying water jets towards the fire on the façade of the adjacent building, Wang Kin House (Block D). When the lift doors opened on that floor, they encountered severe conditions, with smoke accumulating in the upper half of the common corridor. They then took the lift down to 8/F, but upon the doors opening, smoke surged into the lift. They evacuated the building at approximately 15:50 hours.

458. Madam Chong Sio Pek, who lived with her late mother Madam Ieong Vun Ieng at Flat 1405, submitted evidence to the Committee explaining that her family first learned of the fire at Wang Cheong House (Block F) at 14:59 hours, but only realised the severity of the situation at around 15:20 hours, when the fire spread rapidly up Wang Cheong House and Wang Tai House (Block E). They attempted to contact Madam Ieong but when they finally reached her at 15:48 hours, Madam Ieong informed them that the corridors were already smoke-logged and the lifts were

inoperable. Madam Ieong was still able to take a video call from Madam Chong's elder brother at 16:27 hours, but by that time she had already retreated to her bedroom and had sealed the gaps in her door frame with damp towels, as her living room had already become smoke-logged. That was the last time Madam Chong and her family were able to speak with Madam Ieong.

D5. Internal conditions within Wang Tao House (Block B)

459. Wang Tao House (Block B) remained relatively smoke-free until approximately 16:00 hours. CCTV footage showed multiple residents evacuating via the lifts while the corridors remained clear. However, by 16:09 hours (shortly before the video feed terminated, coinciding with the time when the first rapid vertical fire spread up Wang Tao House), residents could be seen covering their faces, suggesting that smoke had begun infiltrating the building.



Figure 5-39: Still image taken from CCTV footage inside lift of Wang Tao House (Block B) (16:08:46 hours)

460. The common corridors of Wang Tao House (Block B) rapidly became smoke-logged at around that time. Residents from Flats 1304 and 1704 testified as to the dense smoke in the corridors which also infiltrated their flats, preventing their escape.

D6. Internal conditions within Wang Yan House (Block A)

461. Wang Yan House (Block A) remained accessible until 18:32 hours, when a rapid vertical fire spread engulfed the re-entrant between Flats 2 and 3. Footage from surveillance cameras showed individuals evacuating, and police officers and firefighters entering the building, until around 18:07 hours. The common corridor on 8/F also remained smoke-free until at least 18:21 hours.



Figure 5-40: Still image taken from CCTV footage inside lift of Wang Yan House (Block A) (18:21:02 hours)

D7. Internal conditions within Wang Shing House (Block G)

462. Finally, the evidence indicates that the conditions inside Wang Shing House (Block G) remained tenable up to around 16:20 hours. This is consistent with the photographic evidence of a fully developed vertical fire in the re-entrant between Flats 6 and 7 at around 16:22 hours.

463. CCTV footage from Wang Shing House (Block G) showed that the lifts remained free of smoke at around 16:16 hours. Residents were able to evacuate via the main entrance as late as around 16:20 hours.



Figure 5-41: Still images taken from CCTV footage inside lift and outside entrance of Wang Shing House (Block G) (16:16:40 and 16:20:28 hours)

464. Mr Leung Ho Hin (witness no 1), a resident of Flat 303, gave evidence that he first learned of the fire via WhatsApp messages from his family at around 15:10 hours. While he heard noises outside, the first sign that anything was wrong in his block occurred at around 15:30 hours, when he tried to turn on the television but there was no signal. He first detected the smell of smoke when he opened his front door at around 16:00 hours. When he left his flat around 16:21 hours, there was already dense white smoke in the common corridor on his floor and in the staircases.



Figure 5-42: Still image taken from CCTV footage outside Flat 303 of Wang Shing House (Block G) (16:21:54 hours)

E. Attempts to Activate FSIs During the Incident

465. The status of the FSIs at WF Court prior to the fire, particularly the progress of the repair works on the FS tanks, is detailed in Chapter 4.

466. In brief, the master power switches for the FASs and FHHRSs had been switched off by an ISS employee for the renovation works. Consequently, the FASs in all eight blocks were inoperative when the fire broke out at Wang Cheong House (Block F).

467. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that successful attempts were made to activate the FASs at Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Sun House (Block C), albeit only briefly.

(i) Mr Lam Man Yan, a Technical Officer employed by ISS at WF Court, testified that, shortly after the discovery of the fire, Madam Cheng Tsz Ying called him and asked him to ascertain why the FASs were not operational (Mr Lam was at the G/F of Wang Sun House (Block C) at the time).

(ii) Unable to reach Wang Cheong House (Block F), Mr Lam Man Yan ran instead to Wang Yan House (Block A) and attempted to activate the break-glass call point, which failed to function. He then went to the FS pump room and found the master power switch sitting in the "OFF" position. Upon moving it to the "ON" position, the fire alarm sounded in Wang Yan House.

(iii) Mr Lam Man Yan then proceeded to Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Sun House (Block C), where he repeated the process. He was unable to activate the fire alarms in Wang Tao House, but successfully activated the fire alarms in Wang Sun House. He then proceeded to Wang Kin House (Block D) but was stopped by police officers, who instructed him to leave the area.

(iv) Cross-referencing Mr Lam Man Yan's evidence against other witness testimonies and contemporaneous evidence obtained by the Committee, the evidence indicates that the fire alarms were first activated in Wang Yan House (Block A) between around 15:20 and 15:27 hours. As for Wang Sun House (Block C), the fire alarm would have been activated sometime between 15:23 hours (when Madam Tsang Wai Tai returned to her residence in Flat 104 to pack her belongings) and 15:35 hours (when she left the building).

(v) Contrary to Mr Lam Man Yan's evidence, the FSD's evidence is that StnO Shek Ngai Chun found the master power switch in the FS pump room of Wang Yan House (Block A) to be in the "OFF" position at approximately 16:00 hours on 26 November 2025. Since the door to the FS pump room was found unlocked, the possibility that someone had entered the FS pump room and deactivated the master power switch cannot be ruled out. Further, Mr Lam's evidence is corroborated by evidence from 55 residents of Wang Yan House present at the scene, who submitted questionnaires to the Police stating that the fire alarms had indeed been activated.

468. As for buildings other than Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Sun House (Block C), the evidence clearly indicates that the FASs and FHHRSs were not activated on the day of the fire. Indeed, attempts by some residents to utilise these FSIs had unfortunately delayed their evacuation.

(i) Madam Chung Sui Ha of ISS testified that she was unable to activate the fire alarms on 1/F and 3/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F). A resident was also observed from

CCTV footage attempting unsuccessfully to activate the fire alarm on 15/F.



Figure 5-43: Still image taken from CCTV footage on 15/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F) at 14:54:12 hours, reproduced by The Collective

(ii) Madam Tse Yuk Wa, Madam Ko Yee Lui, Mr Joe Chan and Mr Chau Chi Wai all testified that they did not hear any fire alarms while evacuating from Wang Cheong House (Block F). Madam Lo Hiu Kei also confirmed that she did not hear any fire alarms during her final telephone conversation with her mother who lived at Flat 808 of Wang Cheong House.

(iii) Mr Law Tak Pui, who evacuated from Wang Tai House (Block E) at around 14:55 hours, and Madam Lam Yin Ming, who escaped from Wang Tai House at 15:12 hours, testified that they did not hear any fire alarms.

(iv) Mr Man Ka Chun testified that, as he descended the staircase from 30/F of Wang Kin House (Block D), he proceeded to each floor to activate the fire alarms. These attempts were unsuccessful on each occasion. He also observed two individuals on the 21/F (whom now known to be Mr Wong Shing Kin of Flat 2108 and Madam Wong of Flat 2107) attempting unsuccessfully to use the FHHRS to extinguish a fire outside their flat. This incident was captured by a door camera on 21/F.



Figure 5-44: Still image taken from CCTV footage on 21/F of Wang Kin House (Block D) at around 15:24 hours, reproduced by Tagline HK

(v) Mr Leung Ho Hin gave evidence that he did not hear any fire alarms throughout his evacuation from Wang Shing House (Block G). He observed a couple attempting unsuccessfully to use the FHHRS at around 15:28 hours.

469. In fact, of the approximately 450 residents of WF Court who were present at the scene of the fire and who completed questionnaires administered by the Police, none heard any fire alarms within Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tai House (Block E), Wang Cheong House (Block F), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H). Only residents of Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Sun House (Block C) heard the fire alarms. Again, this corroborates the evidence of Mr Lam Man Yan of ISS.

470. The Fire Protection Facilities Supervision Division of the FSD inspected the FASs and FHHRSs at WF Court on 26 and 27 November 2025. They observed that the master power switches of all blocks (save for Wang Sun House (Block C)) were in the "OFF" position and that the control fuses of all blocks (save for Wang Cheong House (Block F)) were blown.

471. Attempts were made by the FSD to reactivate the FSIs at Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Shing House (Block G) and Wang Chi House (Block H), but they were only able to successfully activate the fire alarm at Wang Chi House. A summary table of the FSD's findings is below.

Table 5-1: Status of FSIs at WF Court following the fire

	FS Pump / Intermediate Booster Pump	Control Fuse	Master Power Switch
Wang Yan House (Block A)	Could not be actuated despite fuse replacement	Blown	Off
Wang Tao House (Block B)	Could not be actuated	Blown	Off
Wang Sun House (Block C)	Could not be actuated	Blown	On
Wang Kin House (Block D)	Could not be actuated	Blown	Off
Wang Tai House (Block E)	Not tested due to waterlogged pump room	Blown	Off
Wang Cheong House (Block F)	Not tested due to waterlogged pump room	Normal	Off
Wang Shing House (Block G)	Could not be actuated	Blown and mouldy	Off
Wang Chi House (Block H)	Could not be actuated during fire, could be actuated during investigation by replacement of fuses	Blown	Off

F. Fatalities and Casualties

472. The evidence from the Police and the FSD is that 168 individuals perished and 79 individuals were injured in the fire.

(i) The fatalities were 58 men and 110 women ranging from seven months to 98 years old. 114 victims were aged 65 or above, and seven were under the age of 18.

(ii) Amongst the deceased, there were 149 residents of WF Court, 10 domestic helpers, seven construction and renovation workers, one visitor, and one fireman, namely Fireman Ho. 37 households lost two or more members.

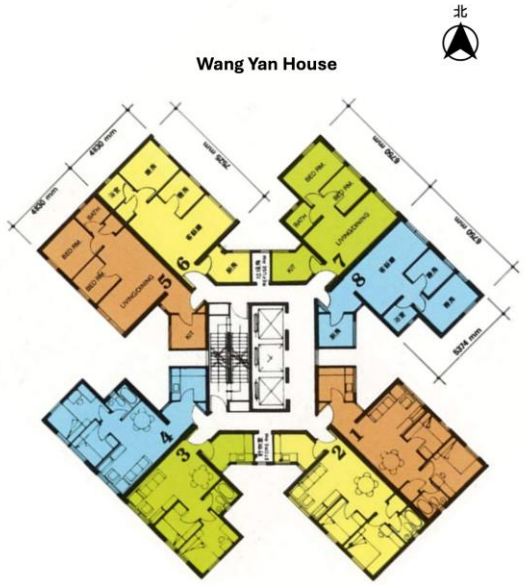
(iii) The bulk of the fatalities were concentrated in Wang Cheong House (Block F) (81 fatalities) and Wang Tai House (Block E) (82 fatalities). There were two fatalities each in Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Sun House (Block C) and one fatality in Wang Shing House (Block G). There were no fatalities in Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Kin House (Block D) and Wang Chi House (Block H).

(iv) The injured were 45 men and 34 women ranging from three months to 87 years old. They included 56 residents, 13 FSD personnel, one news reporter, three visitors, three construction and renovation workers, and three residents of the neighbouring Kwong Fuk Estate.

(v) The injuries were similarly concentrated in Wang Cheong House (Block F) (33 injuries) and Wang Tai House (Block E) (14 injuries). There were nine injuries in Wang Tao House (Block B), two injuries in Wang Shing House (Block G), one injury in Wang Yan House (Block A), and no injuries in Wang Sun House (Block C), Wang Kin House (Block D) and Wang Chi House (Block H).

473. Graphical illustrations prepared by the FSD showing the location where the fatalities and injured persons were found are as follows:

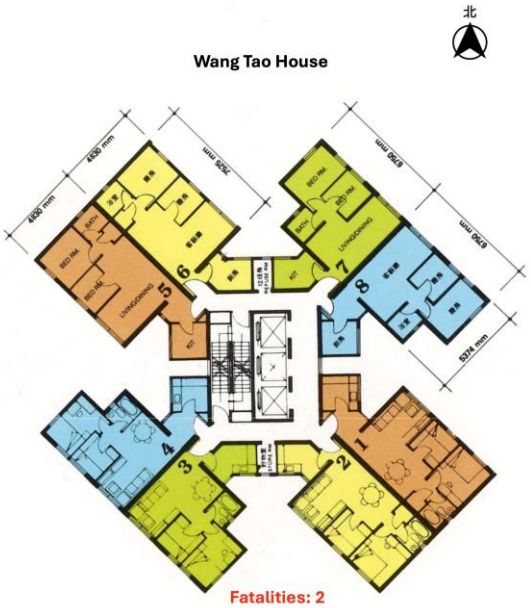
Floor	Room								Common Area		Sub total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	C/C	S/C	
R/F											-
31/F											-
30/F											-
29/F											-
28/F											-
27/F											-
26/F											-
25/F											-
24/F											-
23/F											-
22/F											-
21/F											-
20/F											-
19/F											-
18/F											-
17/F				I28							1
16/F											-
15/F											-
14/F											-
13/F											-
12/F											-
11/F											-
10/F											-
9/F											-
8/F											-
7/F											-
6/F											-
5/F											-
4/F											-
3/F											-
2/F											-
1/F											-
Subtotal	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1



Fatalities: -

Injuries: 1

Floor	Room								Common Area		Sub total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	C/C	S/C	
R/F											-
31/F											-
30/F											-
29/F											-
28/F											-
27/F											-
26/F											-
25/F											-
24/F											-
23/F											-
22/F						F62	F30 I35				2 + 1
21/F											-
20/F											-
19/F											-
18/F											-
17/F				I29, I34							2
16/F										I70	1
15/F											-
14/F											-
13/F									I39, I40		2
12/F											-
11/F											-
10/F											-
9/F											-
8/F											-
7/F											-
6/F											-
5/F											-
4/F											-
3/F								I17, I19, I22			3
2/F											-
1/F											-
G/F											1
Subtotal	-	-	-	2	-	1	1+1	3	2	1	2 + 9



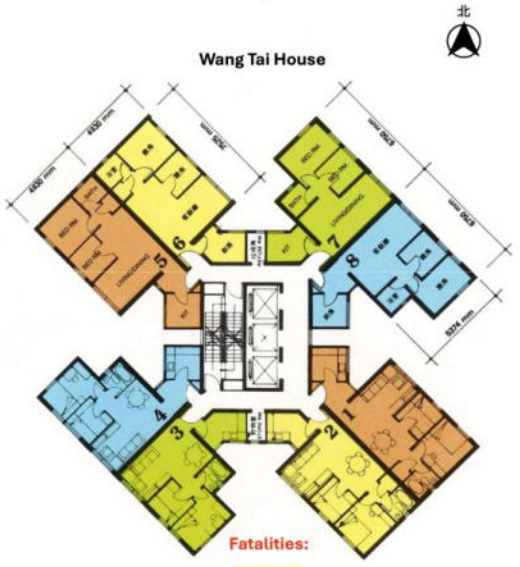
Fatalities: 2

Injuries: 9

Floor	Room								Common Area		Sub total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	C/C	S/C	
R/F											-
31/F											-
30/F											-
29/F											-
28/F											-
27/F											-
26/F											-
25/F											-
24/F											-
23/F											-
22/F											-
21/F											-
20/F											-
19/F											-
18/F											-
17/F											-
16/F											-
15/F											-
14/F					F40						1
13/F											-
12/F											-
11/F											-
10/F											-
9/F											-
8/F											-
7/F											-
6/F				F57							1
5/F											-
4/F											-
3/F											-
2/F											-
1/F											-
Subtotal	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2

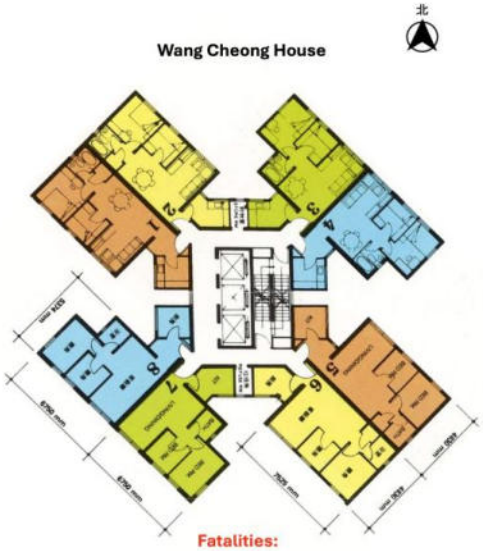


Floor	Room								Common Area		Sub total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	C/C	S/C	
R/F		I44, I45, (F128, F129 Storage Room)									2+2
31/F		F147		I65		F125			F126,F127	F122, F123,F124 F120, F121	9+1
30/F											-
29/F							F77, F78				2
28/F							F96				1
27/F											-
26/F					F160						1
25/F									F115		1
24/F											-
23/F		I60					I36	F145, F146	F79		2 + 1 + 2
22/F	F117					I43, I46					1 + 2
21/F					F154		F80		F101		2 + 1
20/F		F144			F143						2
19/F				F83, F99			F42, F46, F47, F50	F150, F153			6 + 2
18/F										F15, F17	2
17/F	F132								F24		1 + 1
16/F				F133, F134						F25, F32, F82, F88, F92, F93, F100	7 + 2
15/F											-
14/F						I27				F31, F32	2 + 1
13/F											-
12/F	F148									F20, F33	2 + 1
11/F				F39, F48, F65, F66						F14	5
10/F						I15, I16, I20		F118		F13	1 + 1 + 3
9/F								F64, I36	F41, F63		3 + 1
8/F			F43, F59								2
7/F		F152								F29	1 + 1
6/F				F130, F141					F27		1 + 2
5/F		F131, F155									2
4/F			F58							F9, F10	3
3/F						F38				F2, F3, F4, F5, F6	6
2/F											-
1/F					F36					F1	2
G/F		F105 + (I3, I4 all o/s Building)									1 + 2
Subtotal	3	5+1	3	6+4+1	1+ 3	1+1+6	8+1	1+5+1	6 + 3	23 + 5	51+31 + 14



Amendment as at 17.4.2026

Floor	Room								Common Area		Sub total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	C/C	S/C	
R/F				I63, I64							2
31/F									F114		1
30/F	F137	F89, F90						F75, F81			4 + 1
29/F									F108, F109, F110, F111, F112, F113		6
28/F			I67								1
27/F	F156, F166	F140	I61,I62					F136, F138, F159, F162			7 + 2
26/F		F87						F91, F94, F95, F97, F98	F86		7
25/F							F75				1
24/F							F84, F85				2
23/F		F49				F158, F161, F163, F164				F60	2+ 4
22/F	F119									F52, I58	1 +1 +1
21/F	F149, F151	I48	I57, I59				F165		F107		4 + 3
20/F											-
19/F		F55						F135			1 + 1
18/F	F139		I50, I51								2 + 1
17/F	F116	I49				F157					1 + 2
16/F		I47					F142				1 + 1
15/F							I41, I42	I66	F61		3 + 1
14/F											-
13/F			I37					I30,I31 I32			4
12/F		F44, F45, F54, F56							F53		5
11/F									F26,F28		2
10/F			I33				F16	F74		F23	3 + 1
9/F			I38				F167,F168		F25		2 + 1 + 1
8/F		F21						F34			2
7/F								F71, F72, F73	F12		4
6/F				F19							1
5/F		F18,F22						F70			3
4/F			I74		F67, F106					I14, I16	2 + 3
3/F									F11	F8	2
2/F		I6, I7, I11	I23, I24,I73		F68, F69				F7		3 + 6
1/F											-
G/F	I1,I2 (o/s Building), F103, F104									F102	3+2
Subtotal	8	12+1+6	14	1	4	5	4+4+2	13+5+4	9 +8	5 +3	50 + 31 + 33



Amendment as at 17.4.2026

Floor	Room								Common Area		Sub total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	C/C	S/C	
R/F											-
31/F											-
30/F											-
29/F											-
28/F		F51									1
27/F											-
26/F											-
25/F											-
24/F											-
23/F											-
22/F											-
21/F											-
20/F											-
19/F				I12							1
18/F											-
17/F											-
16/F	I13										1
15/F											-
14/F											-
13/F											-
12/F											-
11/F											-
10/F											-
9/F											-
8/F											-
7/F											-
6/F											-
5/F											-
4/F											-
3/F											-
2/F											-
1/F											-
G/F											-
Subtotal	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 + 2

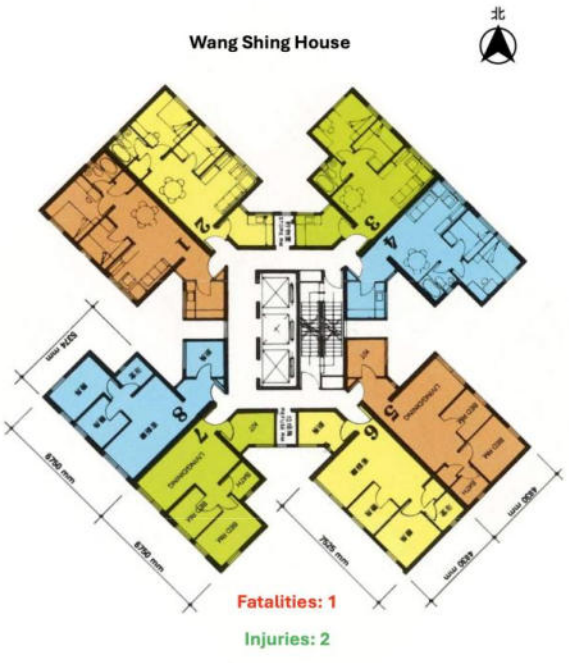


Figure 5-45: Diagrams illustrating location of fatalities and injuries

474. It is notable that for Wang Cheong House (Block F), 57 of the 81 fatalities (70%) were found within flats with the remaining 24 found in staircases and corridors.

475. For Wang Tai House (Block E), 41 of the 82 fatalities (50%) were found within flats, whereas the remaining 41 were found in common spaces.

476. This illustrates that for Wang Cheong House (Block F), the fire took hold so rapidly that occupants had no opportunity to escape before being overwhelmed with smoke. In contrast, a larger number of occupants of Wang Tai House (Block E) had discovered the fire and had begun evacuating from their flats, but were then overwhelmed by smoke in the staircases.

477. Based on post-mortem reports and autopsies conducted by the public mortuary,[71] 91 deaths were caused by the inhalation of fire fumes. They had raised levels of carboxyhaemoglobin in blood ranging from 15% to 80% saturation (with 50% saturation typically considered life threatening and associated with deep coma, cramps, cardiovascular failure and cardiac arrest).

478. Professors Usmani and Jiang have analysed how five individuals perished in flats in Wang Cheong House (Block F) which were completely undamaged, namely four individuals in Flat 1202 and one individual in Flat 2602. These fatalities were caused by two different modes of smoke spread:

(i) In respect of Flat 1202 of Wang Cheong House (Block F), smoke infiltrated the unit through the door gaps, as heavy

71 25 autopsies were conducted and 143 waivers were granted.

soot deposition is observed on the ceiling of the entrance foyer of the unit. The smoke most likely came from Flat 1201, which sustained serious fire damage, and the front door of the unit was completely burnt through.

(ii) In contrast, for Flat 2602 of Wang Cheong House (Block F), the front door showed little soot deposition in the area facing the corridor. Since windows were found open, it is believed that smoke entered the unit from the exterior through the open windows.

479. These examples demonstrated the fatal effects of smoke in units which were not damaged by the fire. There were numerous other examples of fatalities in units or common areas undamaged by fire. Illustrating the extent to which smoke spread within the blocks:

(i) There were two fatalities in Flats 2206 and 2207 of Wang Tao House (Block B), which were completely undamaged by the fire. The cause of death of these occupants was the inhalation of fire fumes.

(ii) There was one fatality each in Flats 306 and 2107 of Wang Tai House (Block E) and Flat 2802 of Wang Shing House (Block G). Their causes of death were similarly inhalation of fire fumes.

(iii) Professors Usmani and Jiang also observed that a significant proportion of fatalities occurred in the staircases and common corridors which did not contain any combustible fuel to generate flames or heat. This meant that smoke inhalation was the likely cause of death in these locations.

480. Another 65 deaths were caused by "adverse effects of fire", denoting persons whose remains were seriously burnt resulting in significant charring or disintegration, such that it was not possible to determine the specific cause of death. Given the circumstantial evidence of fire, however, their deaths were likely caused by one or more of the typical causes of death, namely burn injuries, heat, inhalation of carbon monoxide or other noxious substances, trauma and/or pre-existing conditions such as natural disease or other injuries.

481. A further 12 deaths were determined to have been caused by a combination of inhalation of fire fumes and burns and/or multiple medical causes (such as heart disease).

482. As for the injuries sustained in the fire, 50 of the 79 injured persons (63%) were admitted to hospital for inhalation injuries, shortness of breath, hypothermia or hyperventilation, three were admitted for burns, and 26 were admitted for a variety of conditions including heat exhaustion, physical injuries or minor conditions.

483. Finally, it would be right to pay tribute to the work of the FSD and the Disaster Victim Identification Unit ("DVIU") of the Police in locating and recovering the remains of the deceased from the scene of the fire. FSD personnel recovered 106 bodies from the scene as part of their search and rescue operations, and the DVIU recovered body parts identified as belonging to 61 fatalities during their operation between 29 November and 9 December 2025. The final fatality was located by a forensic pathologist on 19 December 2025. For those involved in the exercise, this was a difficult and traumatic task.

G. Property Damage

484. In terms of property damage by the fire, the evidence from the FSD is set out in the following paragraphs. It should be noted that the evidence is not relevant to such matters as the integrity of the building structures or whether the units are fit for occupation.

(i) Wang Cheong House (Block F) experienced substantial damage across all floors. 158 flats (approximately 63%), common corridors of 27 floors (87%) and 34 flights of staircases (55%) were assessed as extremely severely damaged (as indicated in red in the following figures)[72] or severely damaged (as indicated in orange in the following figures).[73]

(ii) However, most of Flats 2 and 3 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) (being the north-facing flats and the only flats adjacent to an unaffected re-entrant) only suffered minor damage (as indicated in yellow in the following figures) or were undamaged (as indicated in green in the following figures).

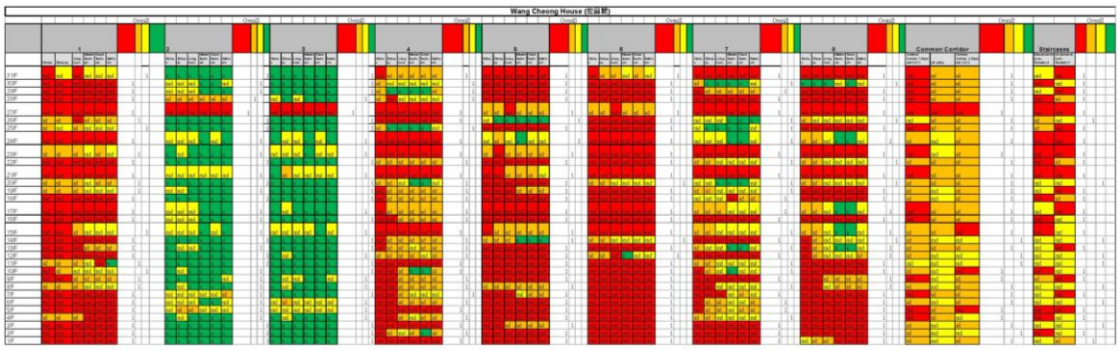


Figure 5-46: Diagram illustrating damage to flats and common spaces in Wang Cheong House (Block F)

72 Denoting a completely burnt-out condition, with all combustible materials fully consumed or converted to ash, with extensive charring and deformation.

73 Denoting significant burnout, with majority of combustible materials destroyed, extensive charring and deformation.

(iii) Wang Tai House (Block E) suffered similar amounts of damage as Wang Cheong House (Block F). 145 flats (58%), common corridors on 29 floors (94%) and 34 flights of staircases (55%) were assessed as extremely severely damaged or severely damaged.

(iv) As with Wang Cheong House (Block F), it is notable that the north-facing Flats 6 and 7 of Wang Tai House (Block E) were largely undamaged.

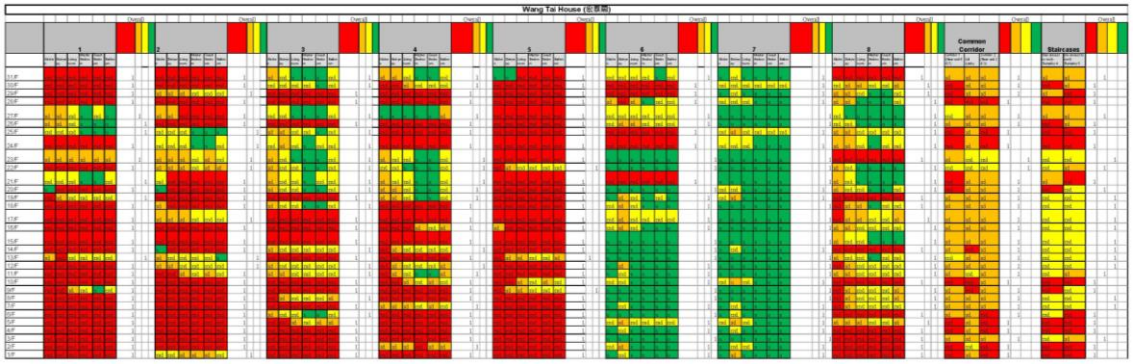


Figure 5-47: Diagram illustrating damage to flats and common spaces in Wang Tai House (Block E)

(v) Wang Kin House (Block D) was largely undamaged. Only one flat on the sixteenth floor was extremely severely damaged and seven other flats (2.8%) suffered minor damage, four of which were on the same floor. Only the common corridor on 16/F experienced fire damage, with all other corridors and staircases unaffected.

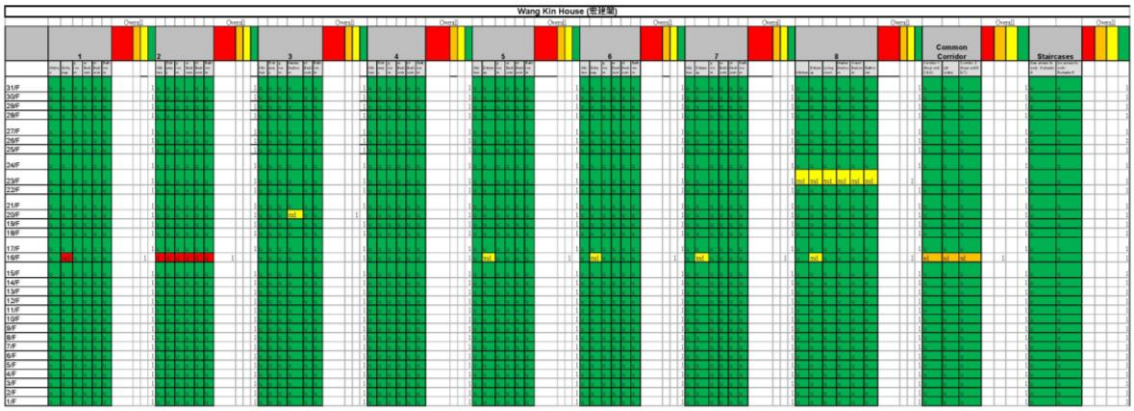


Figure 5-48: Diagram illustrating damage to flats and common spaces in Wang Kin House (Block D)

(vi) Wang Sun House (Block C), in contrast, was severely damaged, with every flat suffering some degree of damage. In total, 146 flats (58%), common corridors on all 31 floors (100%) and 50 flights of staircases (81%) were assessed as extremely severely damaged or severely damaged.

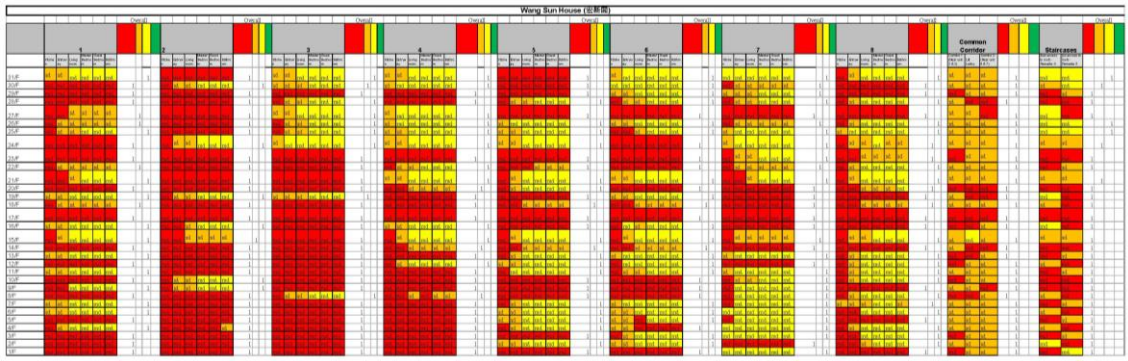


Figure 5-49: Diagram illustrating damage to flats and common spaces in Wang Sun House (Block C)

(vii) As to Wang Tao House (Block B), 40 flats (16%), common corridors on 14 floors (45%) and one flight of staircases (1.6%) were assessed as extremely severely damaged or

severely damaged. Damage was concentrated on the south-facing Flats 2 and 3, which were the flats adjacent to the re-entrant which experienced rapid vertical fire spread at around 16:11 hours.

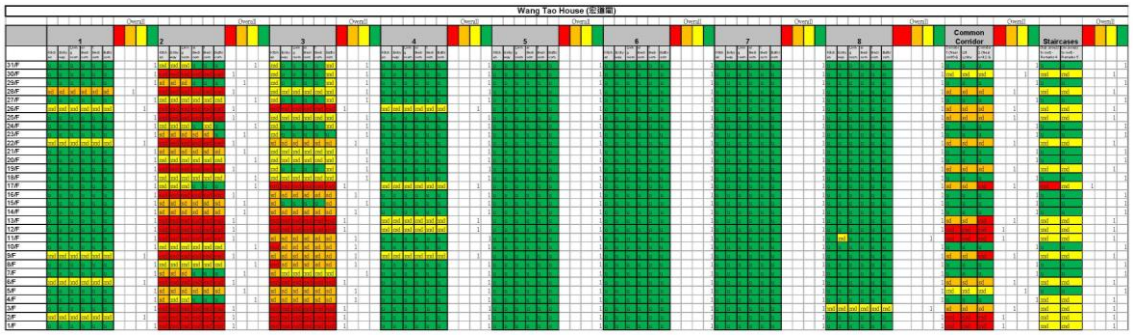


Figure 5-50: Diagram illustrating damage to flats and common spaces in Wang Tao House (Block B)

(viii) The position in Wang Yan House (Block A) was similar. 52 flats (21%), common corridors on 21 floors (68%) and two flights of staircases (3.2%) were assessed as extremely severely damaged or severely damaged. Most of the damaged flats were Flats 2 and 3, i.e. south-facing flats adjacent to the re-entrant which experienced rapid vertical spread.

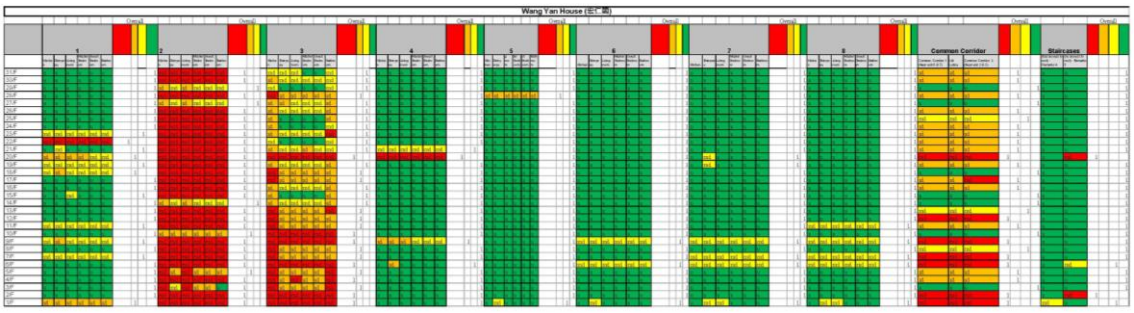


Figure 5-51: Diagram illustrating damage to flats and common spaces in Wang Yan House (Block A)

(ix) Finally, Wang Shing House (Block G) was relatively unaffected. 21 flats (8.5%), common corridors on 10 floors (32%) and two flights of staircases (3.2%) were extremely severely damaged or severely damaged. The damage was concentrated on the south-facing Flats 6 and 7, flats which were adjacent to the re-entrant which experienced rapid vertical spread.

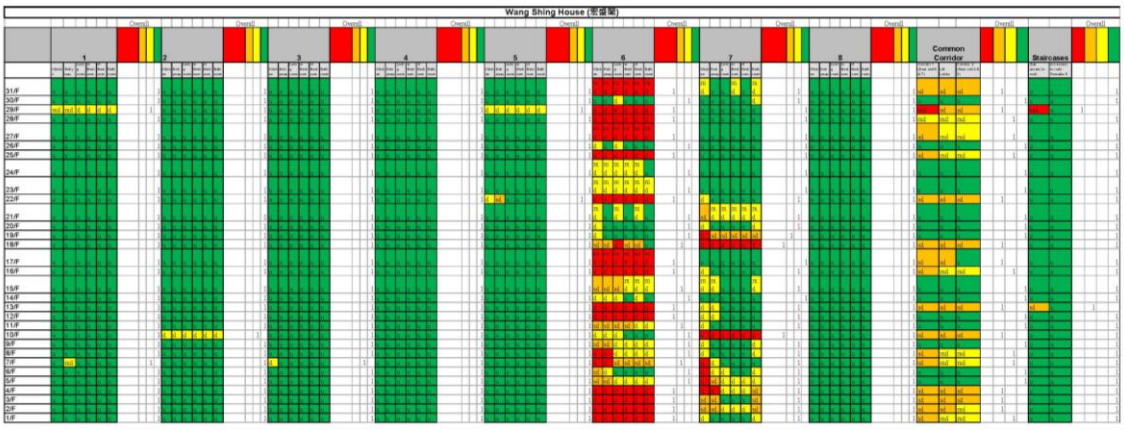


Figure 5-52: Diagram illustrating damage to flats and common spaces in Wang Shing House (Block G)

CHAPTER 6
CAUSES OF THE FIRE, FIRE SPREAD AND EAVY CASUALTIES

A. OVERVIEW

485. The fire in WF Court in Tai Po on 26 November 2025 was one of the gravest tragedies to have ever occurred in Hong Kong. Even many months later, the scale of the disaster – the loss of 168 lives, and the abrupt destruction of a neighbourhood which thousands called home, where they built families and created memories – remains difficult to conceive.

486. In this Chapter, the Committee will examine the causes of the fire, fire spread and heavy casualties. On the examination of these issues, the Committee has been assisted by the valuable expert evidence given by the Committee's experts, Professor Usmani and Professor Jiang, and the IFITF's experts including Professor Yuen and Dr Lee of the Government Laboratory. Their evidence presents a clear scientific picture of the issues that the Committee has to deal with in this Chapter. Their opinions and evidence supply the Committee with a scientific foundation to assess the responsibilities of the various parties and to make recommendations on how to prevent such tragedies in the future.

487. As the Committee has seen from the Evidential Hearing, the conclusions in the expert reports are the product of detailed reviews of photographic and videographic evidence of the fire and its aftermath, experimental data from full-scale fire tests and combustion tests, and CFD simulations. The Committee's and the IFITF's experts have worked independently but nonetheless reached substantially similar conclusions. As rightly observed by Mr Dawes SC, this lends substantial weight to their conclusions. In fact, the experts' opinions, hypotheses and methodologies were not challenged in the Evidential Hearing.

488. In examining the issues in this Chapter, the Committee will rely on the following reports:

(i) IFITF Final Report on No 5 alarm fire in WF Court on 26 November 2025 submitted by the IFITF to the Committee in May 2026, including as appendices:

(a) Professor Yuen Final Expert Report; and

(b) various statements of Dr Lee;

(ii) Committee Expert Report of Professors Usmani and Jiang.

489. In order to help the Committee and the public to understand their evidence, the experts (including Dr Lee) also made presentations (to summarise their evidence) in the Evidential Hearing which will be referred to in various parts of this Chapter.

490. The remaining part of this Chapter will be divided into the following parts:

(i) Section B: Origin of the fire;

(ii) Section C: Cause of the fire;

(iii) Section D: Analysis of the spread of the fire;

(iv) Section E: Causes of heavy casualties; and

(v) Section F: Concluding remarks on the aforesaid issues.

B. ORIGIN OF THE FIRE

491. The evidence shows that the fire was most likely caused by a glowing source, likely a cigarette, which ignited paper materials on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and caused them to smoulder.

492. Dr Lee explained that the damage in the light well between Flats 104 and 105 was substantially more severe than that in the other light wells of that block. Since the severity of fire damage reflects the length of time the area was affected by fire, this suggests that the light well between Flats 104 and 105 burned for longer and more intensely than other light wells.

493. The concrete spalling patterns in Flats 104 and 105 also showed that the fire spread from the light well into the flats, as opposed to from the flats into the light wells. Specifically, concrete spalling was more severe in areas closer to the kitchen window in both flats (being the closest window to the light well) and decreased in severity as one moved away from the area. Parts of the concrete ceiling in the area above the kitchen window had burnt through and detached, whereas the ceiling of the entryway only displayed cracks.

Flat 105, Wang Cheong House



View of main entrance (the head jamb being consumed by fire, while the door jambs mostly charred with only the edge facing the flat irregular, showing the sign of being consumed by the fire from the flat)



View of kitchen window (the extent of fire damage in form of spalling was most serious at the concrete window overhang outside. The severity of the fire damage to the inner kitchen wall decreased with an increase in distance away from the window.)

Figure 6-1: Photos of Flat 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F), reproduced in Dr Lee's presentation at hearing on 22 June 2026

494. Likewise, the damage to the corridor of Wang Cheong House (Block F) showed that the fire spread out of Flats 104 and 105 into the corridor, not vice versa.

1/F corridor, Wang Cheong House



A: View of entrance Flat 105-106



B: View of entrance Flat 103-104



View of corridor from Flat 107-108 towards Flat 105-106, with close-up view at **Photo A** (more severe heat damage at the end of Flat 105-106)



View of corridor from Flat 101-102 towards Flat 103-104, with close-up view of the end of Flat 103-104 at **Photo B**

Figure 6-2: Photos of 1/F corridor of Wang Cheong House (Block F), reproduced in Dr Lee's presentation at hearing on 22 June 2026

495. Dr Lee's analysis is consistent with the contemporaneous evidence, including CCTV footage, Mr Yip Fai's video footage of the fire on the flat roof, and the timing by which residents discovered the fire. These have been addressed in Chapter 5.

496. The photographic and videographic evidence has also been analysed for the purpose of eliminating additional sources of fire. For example, a resident has submitted video footage of flames on the west face of Wang Kin House (Block D) at around 15:15 hours.



Figure 6-3: Still image taken from video footage captured outside Wang Kin House (Block D) at around 15:15 hours

497. Since the west elevation of Wang Kin House (Block D) does not face Wang Cheong House (Block F), there have been suggestions (such as in the online video from which the still image above was captured) that a separate fire broke out at Wang Kin House. However, the totality of the evidence before the Committee suggests that the flames captured on Wang Kin House spread from the original fire at Wang Cheong House:

(i) By 15:15 hours, there had already been fires in three re-entrants at Wang Cheong House (Block F). These fires produced substantial amounts of flaming debris, some of which had been ejected high up in the air. Large pieces of flaming debris had also begun to fall on the rooftop of Wang Sun House (Block C, the block adjacent to Wang Kin House).

(ii) The fire on the exterior of Wang Kin House (Block D) was relatively small and confined to the façade. None of the flats in the vicinity of the flames shown in the figure above suffered any interior fire damage. This supports the conclusion that this was the product of external fire spread from Wang Cheong House (Block F), as opposed to a separate source of fire.

(iii) According to the CFD simulations carried out by the IFITF, flying embers could have reached the west face of Wang Kin House (Block D) from the re-entrant fires at Wang Cheong House (Block F) based on the wind conditions at the time.

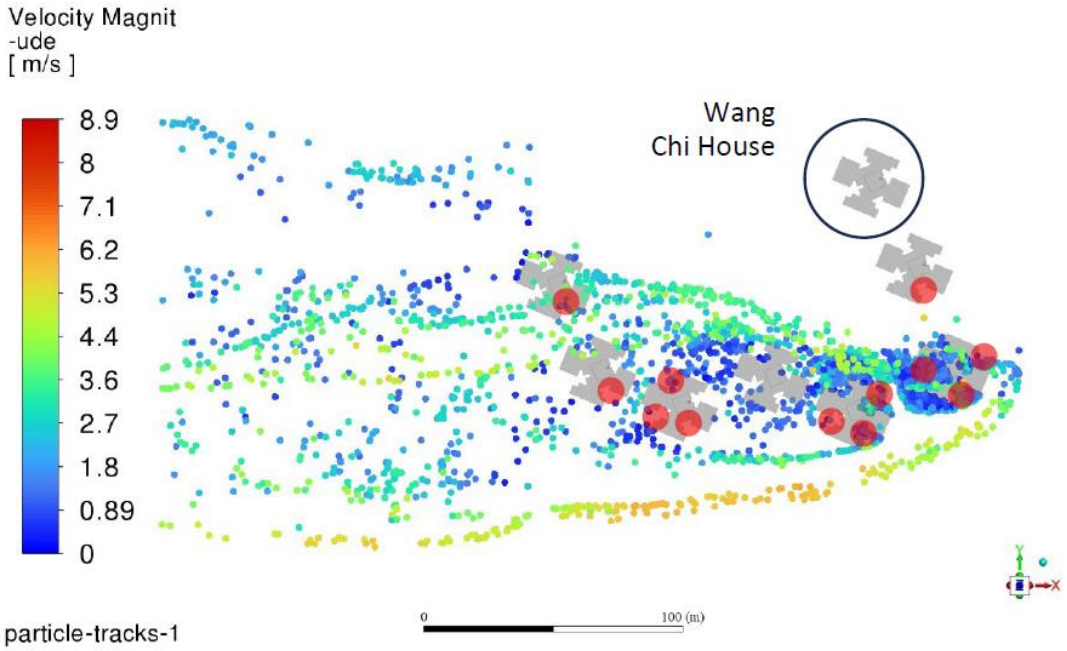


Figure 6-4: CFD simulation of wind conditions at WF Court on 26 November 2025

498. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Committee received no other videos or photographs indicating an alternative origin of the fire at Wang Cheong House (Block F). Dr Lee also confirmed that she had not identified any other possible seat of fire. The preponderance of evidence therefore supports the conclusion that the fire began as a single fire on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House. The Committee therefore so finds.

C. CAUSE OF THE FIRE

499. As pointed out by Mr Dawes SC, there are several categories of evidence which point to a lighted cigarette being the cause of the fire.

500. First, there is substantial evidence of construction workers smoking on site, including on the scaffolding, in the months leading up to the fire:

(i) The Committee heard numerous accounts from residents who testified in the Evidential Hearing of workers smoking outside designated areas or improperly disposing of cigarettes. For example, Madam Tse Yuk Wa testified that she saw workers smoking on the scaffolding. Similarly, Mr George Cheung mentioned finding cigarette packs on the scaffolding and on top of his air conditioning unit during the scaffolding works. His wife also routinely encountered plastic bottles filled with cigarettes in the staircases. Other residents, such as Madam Wong Ka Yuen and Madam Ko Yee Lui, also mentioned routinely smelling cigarette smoke wafting into their flats from outside the building.

(ii) The complaints logbook maintained by the management office recorded persistent complaints about workers smoking on the scaffolding: for example, complaints on 29 July 2024 (smoking during erection of scaffolding), 9 October 2024 (workers disposed of lit cigarette end on scaffolding), 24 December 2024 (workers frequently smoking in corridors and on scaffolding), 24 February 2025 (workers smoking on scaffolding).

(iii) More than a dozen complaints about workers smoking were made to the Government departments. Indeed, just two weeks before the day of the fire, the LD and the FSD received a complaint about workers smoking on the scaffolding[74], which raised concerns about the risk of a scaffolding fire.

(iv) Mr Tony Tsui testified that despite the MC having repeatedly raised the issue with PC&E, the problem about on-site smoking had not been satisfactorily resolved, and the complaints continued throughout.

501. The situation persisted until the day of the fire:

(i) The audio track from the CCTV footage taken above the seat of the fire recorded that, when the fire started, workers on the scaffolding assumed that the smoke was caused by a worker having improperly disposed of a cigarette: see Section A of Chapter 5.

(ii) At 14:45 hours on 26 November 2025, a video was sent in a WhatsApp group between PC&E and Will Power showing numerous cigarettes in the staircases of Wang Shing House (Block G).

74 Ref No 34 in the LD list and Ref No 26 in the FSD list at Annex 8.



Figure 6-5: Still image taken from video footage captured from 11/F to 12/F of Wang Shing House (Block G) circulated in WhatsApp group between PC&E and Will Power at 14:45 hours on 26 November 2025

(iii) Post-fire inspections of the scaffolding in Wang Chi House (Block H) also revealed work platforms littered with, *inter alia*, cigarette butts and boxes.





Figure 6-6: Photos showing cigarette ends and boxes found on the first level scaffolding at Wang Chi House (Block H)

(iv) The CCTV captured a worker, wearing a PC&E uniform, smoking on the rooftop of Wang Cheong House (Block F) shortly before the fire was discovered.



Figure 6-7: Still image taken from CCTV footage captured from the rooftop of Wang Cheong House (Block F) at 14:44 hours (reference time was around 14:45 hours)

502. Second, the excavation of debris on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) uncovered: (i) two cigarette ends; (ii) a burnt remnant of a cigarette end; and (iii) a substantial amount of partially burnt materials (including cardboard boxes and backing papers for the mosaic tiles, and fragments of toe boards and plastic boards). If the cardboard came into contact with a cigarette butt that had not been extinguished, it could smoulder (i.e. burn unnoticed and without any flame) for a period of time before igniting and turning into a flaming combustion.

503. Dr Lee explained that these combustible materials were likely to be in close proximity to the initial source of the fire, and were preserved in their partially burnt state when other combustible materials fell from height, suffocating the fire at the initial site of ignition.

504. The littering of scaffolding platforms and flat roofs with combustible debris and materials was pervasive, as noted in sub-section C6 of Chapter 4.

505. The low humidity level at the time of the fire (between 40% and 50%) reduced the moisture content in materials, rendering them more prone to combustion, and facilitated the development of smouldering fires.



Figure 6-8(a): Photo showing the piling up of debris on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F)



Figure 6-8(b): Photo showing the foam board window covers found at the suspected place of fire origin



Figure 6-8(c): Photo showing one of the cigarette ends found at the subject flat roof



Photo 6-8(d): Photo showing the burnt remnants of carton paper boxes found at the subject flat roof

506. Third, several other typical causes of fire have been ruled out in the case of WF Court by the IFITF:

(i) Sparks from hot works: It is unlikely that the fire was caused by sparks from hot works such as welding. The only works being conducted near the seat of the fire were the re-tiling of mosaic tiles on the external walls, which did not involve any welding. This is consistent with the progress of works examined in Section C of Chapter 4, where it was concluded that the hacking-off works had been completed across all blocks, and the majority of blocks were undergoing rendering and tiling processes.

(ii) Spontaneous combustion: Fire caused by materials which may combust at room temperature when exposed to air (such as lithium batteries, compost or hay) has been ruled out in the case of WF Court as there is no evidence of such materials being present in the flat roof area.

(iii) Electrical faults: The Electricity Legislation Division ("ELD") of the EMSD examined the subject light well platform suspected to be the seat of the fire and did not find any electrical installation or product. There were no signs of electrical fault in the electrical installations in areas closest to the suspected source of fire, including the bicycle parking area and Flats 104 and 105. As such, the possibility of the fire having started from an electrical fault was ruled out.

(iv) Gas leakage: Liquefied petroleum gas ("LPG") was supplied through heavy grade steel pipes on the right-hand side of the re-entrant between Flats 104 and 105 at Wang Cheong House (Block F). Inspections performed by the Gas Standards Office ("GSO") of the EMSD following the fire identified no instances of pipe rupture. There were no reports of suspected LPG leakage in the three months leading up to the fire. Nor was there any unusual gas consumption on the day of the fire. Moreover, the video footage of the fire did not exhibit any characteristics associated with a flame caused by LPG leakage. Thus, the EMSD ruled out gas leakage as the cause of the fire.

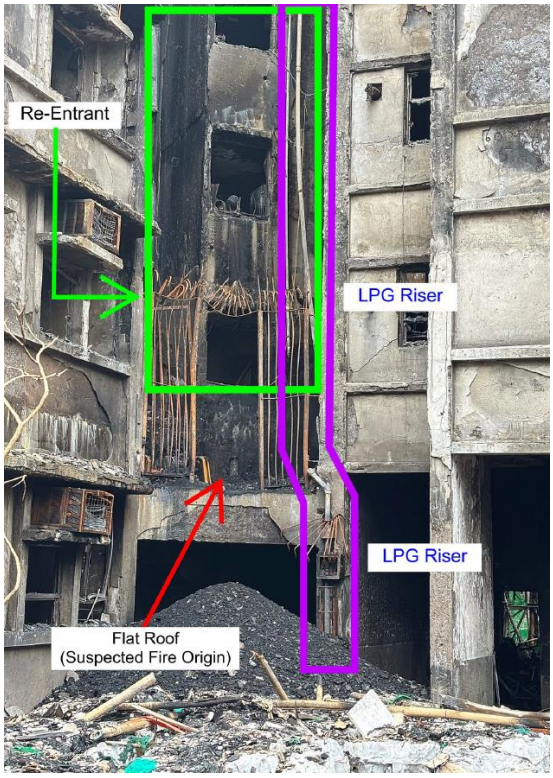


Figure 6-9: Diagram illustrating LPG riser in the re-entrant of Wang Cheong House (Block F), IFITF Final Report

(v) Arson by the use of accelerants: Dr Lee tested debris found on the flat roof outside Flats 104 and 105 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) for ignitable liquid residue and found none. Dr Lee also inspected the concrete surface of the flat roof and noted that it was relatively unaffected by fire, with none of the concrete spalling which would typically be seen if the fire was started with accelerants. It was therefore concluded that the fire was unlikely to have been started with the use of accelerants.

507. Though there is no direct evidence showing that a lighted cigarette was the cause of the fire, there is ample circumstantial evidence supporting that it was the case. Further, none of the experts in the Inquiry

challenged the analysis of the IFITF and Dr Lee in this regard. The Committee therefore finds that a lighted cigarette was the most likely cause of the fire in WF Court.

D. ANALYSIS OF THE SPREAD OF THE FIRE

508. The Committee has heard detailed evidence regarding the mode of spread of the fire from the Committee's experts (i.e. Professors Usmani and Jiang) and the witnesses of the IFITF.

509. Both teams of experts agreed that the development of the fire involved three primary modes: (i) the rapid vertical fire spread up the re-entrants; (ii) fire spread from the re-entrants into individual flats; and (iii) secondary ignitions from combustible materials on the façade.

D1. Vertical fire spread

510. Chapter 5 described how the localised fire in the Wang Cheong House (Block F) re-entrant developed, within minutes, into a towering pillar of flame. Rapid vertical fires subsequently engulfed 11 other re-entrants during the fire.

511. Further, the evidence analysed in Chapter 5 establishes a significant correlation between the rapid re-entrant fires and the extent of interior damage, as well as the compromised tenability of staircases and corridors adjacent to the re-entrant fires.

512. The experts have analysed the key factors that caused the rapid ascent of flames along the re-entrants.

513. As Professors Usmani and Jiang explained, the geometry of the re-entrant strongly influenced the height and velocity of the flames. Under the stack effect (or the chimney effect), hot combustion gases rise within a vertical shaft or semi-enclosed space, creating negative pressure at the base that increases inflow of air to enhance oxygen supply and thereby accelerating combustion. The geometry of the re-entrants resulted in them acting as partial chimneys, allowing for the rapid vertical propagation of flames and smoke. Simulations demonstrate that had the fire occurred against a single flat wall or even a corner, the flames would not have reached the full height of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and would have spread far less rapidly.

514. Likewise, the IFITF found that the re-entrants, like other structural shafts such as lift shafts, "*naturally channelled rising smoke and hot gases*", allowing the fire to rapidly engulf multiple floors in a short timeframe.

515. Nevertheless, the geometry of the re-entrant alone could not have led to the rapid fire spread. The experts agree that the accumulation of large quantities of combustibles within the re-entrants was a key factor that caused a localised fire to develop into a rapid vertical blaze.

516. The combustible materials provided an abundant fuel load to sustain and intensify the fire. Moreover, when a large volume of combustible materials is present in a re-entrant, the chimney effect will propel the flames upward, igniting more combustibles along the re-entrant. This process created a feedback loop that exponentially accelerated both the vertical fire spread and upward flow of hot gases.

517. The final key factor is the presence of non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets and canvases.

518. As addressed in Chapter 4, Professor Yuen's opinion is that, if the safety nets and canvases at WF Court were fire retardant, the initial fire would "*have self-extinguished*" and not cause the combustible materials inside the re-entrant to catch fire. He therefore agreed with Mr Dawes SC that, with all other conditions on site remaining the same, the rapid vertical fire along the Wang Cheong House (Block F) re-entrant would not have developed had the scaffolding nets and canvases used on site possessed fire-retardant properties.

519. Professors Usmani and Jiang were in general agreement with Professor Yuen's analysis. However, Professor Usmani expressed his view more cautiously in that, had the scaffolding nets been fire-retardant, the initial fire "*may*" have self-extinguished.

520. As rightly observed by Mr Dawes SC, it was reasonable for Professor Usmani to take a cautious approach. The full-scale fire tests conducted by the IFITF at the Sichuan University of Science and Engineering demonstrated that if the fire size was sufficiently large, all combustible materials within the re-entrant would likely be consumed irrespective of whether they were fire-retardant. Professor Yuen clarified in evidence that these large fire size tests involved a large ignition source with a heat release rate of 2.5 megawatts.[75]

521. Therefore, Professor Yuen's conclusion is dependent on the size of the ignition source at Wang Cheong House (Block F). In this regard, Professor Yuen agreed that the fire very likely began as a small ignition source. He opined that the footage showed the fire going largely unnoticed at its inception, which strongly suggests that it was a small initial fire. This is consistent with the conclusion in Section C above.

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75 Professor Yuen clarified in his oral testimony that the 2.5 megawatts heat release rate was measured within a re-entrant.

522. In the case of a small ignition source, the non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets likely played a critical role in the development of the fire:

(i) The experiments conducted by the IFITF and the Committee's experts both showed that, when exposed to a small ignition source[76]: fire-retardant safety nets self-extinguished fire; whereas non-fire-retardant safety nets continued to spread fire and generated flaming droplets.

(ii) During fire tests at the Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, when non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets and canvases were exposed to a small ignition source, they caused the fire to spread to combustibles resulting in the ignition of bamboo members. That test (Test 13) yielded a total energy release of 10,155.92 megajoules. As compared with a total energy release of 367.65 megajoules where fire-retardant scaffolding nets and canvases were used, it represented a 27-fold increase.

(iii) The tests at the Sichuan University of Science and Engineering illustrate the role of non-fire-retardant material in unlocking the energy contained in bamboo, which is not easy to ignite, but will ignite if exposed to significant heat.

(iv) The Committee's experts likewise conducted experiments which showed that the non-fire-retardant nets seized by the Police from Wang Chi House (Block H) dripped and distributed flames to combustible materials, allowing the fire to grow sufficiently large to ignite bamboo.

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76 Professor Yuen Final Expert Report para 2.7.2 (1.5 megawatts); Committee Expert Report para 3.6.8 (90 kilowatts or 0.09 megawatts).

(v) Professor Yuen's CFD simulations also compared fire-retardant nets with non-fire-retardant nets under a small ignition source of 700 kilowatts. When fire-retardant nets were used, the simulation showed no rapid fire spread in the re-entrant and peaked at 35 megawatts, demonstrating that fire-retardant nets suppressed early fire growth. In contrast, a large re-entrant fire developed when non-fire-retardant nets and Wang Chi House (Block H) nets were used, peaking at over 700 megawatts.

523. Ultimately, Professors Usmani and Jiang agreed with Professor Yuen's conclusion that the lack of fire-retardant qualities in the safety nets and canvases played an important role in the rapid spread of the fire. [redacted]

524. There is also some concern as to whether bamboo poles used for the erection of the scaffolding played any part in the spread of the fire. The tests conducted by the Committee's experts showed that bamboo could not be ignited by low amounts of heat, but when subjected to high heating conditions, fast pyrolysis and burning could occur.

525. Whilst there are some voices that bamboo scaffolding should be replaced by metal scaffolding in the future, all the experts agree that careful study should be conducted before making any changes in this regard. Bamboo scaffolding may have its value in the construction eco-system in Hong Kong, and further discussion on this subject will be made in Chapter 12.

D2. Fire spread into flats

526. The lateral spread of fire from the façade into individual flats was also addressed by the experts.

527. The IFITF Final Report analysed several modes of internal fire spread:

(i) The IFITF's hypothesis posits that the fire predominantly spread into units through openings such as open or broken windows. This is supported by the evidence that units with living room windows immediately adjacent to re-entrants with rapid fire spread sustained far greater damage.

(ii) The IFITF observed from the Sichuan University of Science and Engineering fire tests that the radiant heat flux may have been sufficient to ignite combustibles within units without breaking the windows.

(iii) The IFITF analysed units which suffered severe interior damage but showed no severe damage on the external wall, such as Flat 2004 of Wang Yan House (Block A). The fire likely spread internally from other units through the destruction of entrance doors.

528. The Committee's experts also conducted detailed analysis on how the external fire infiltrated the internal units through living room windows adjacent to re-entrants that were engulfed in rapid vertical fires.

529. The evidence indicates that the heat of the rapid re-entrant fires was strong enough to break living room windows immediately adjacent to the re-entrant. It is notable that all living room windows of Flat 5 from 8/F to 31/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and of Flat 2 from 8/F to 31/F of Wang Tao House (Block B) were broken during the fire.

530. There was also a clear correlation between the orientation of the large living room windows and the extent of internal damage. For example, the living room windows of Flat 5 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) were immediately adjacent to the re-entrant. These units suffered substantially more severe damage than Flat 4 units, which were equidistant to the re-entrant but only had small bathroom windows adjacent to the re-entrant.

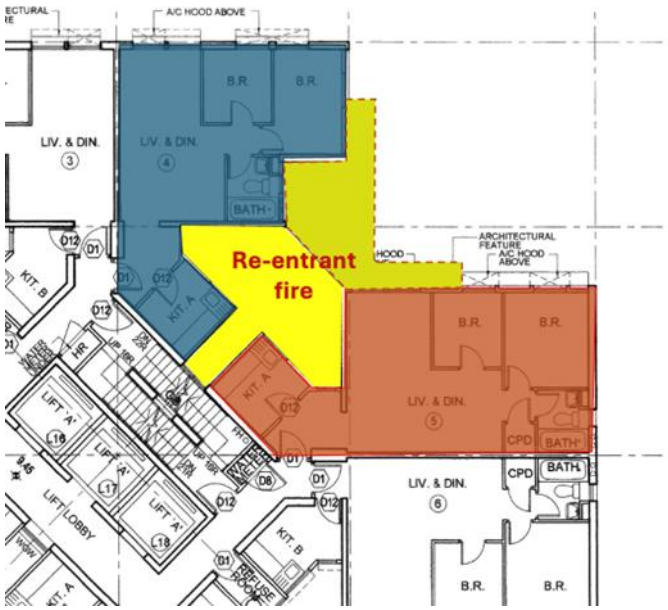


Figure 6-10: Diagram illustrating configuration of re-entrant between Flats 4 and 5 of Wang Cheong House (Block F), taken from Committee experts' presentation in the Evidential Hearing on 25 June 2026

531. Although the kitchen windows were within the re-entrants and in closest proximity to the rapid vertical fire, they did not substantially contribute to internal fire spread. Professor Jiang explained that fire spread within room units depends on the ignition of combustibles, but the area near the kitchen windows would not normally contain combustibles. Another possible reason is that kitchen doors at WF Court were built as 30-minute fire-rated doors, in accordance with the Code of Practice on Provision of Means of Escape in Case of Fire and Allied Requirements 1976.

532. As mentioned above, the IFITF also observed an asymmetry in the damage sustained by flats adjacent to re-entrants which was "*likely attributable to the larger window openings in the living room and the higher fire load present within that space*". The IFITF noted that the asymmetry appears to be unrelated to the kitchens.

533. Once the fire spread internally and became fully developed indoors, the fire could spread to adjacent units through the front door. As noted above, the IFITF cited the example of fire spread to Flat 2004 of Wang Yan House (Block A). Similarly, Professor Jiang referred to the internal spread of fire through the front door of Flat 2704 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) to Flat 2703, noting that Flat 2703 was not exposed to a re-entrant fire.

534. Another mode of fire spread was "leap-frogging". When internal fires go into a flashover, they may break through a window, causing flames to leap out of the window, stick to the wall and break the window of the room above. Video footage showed ejecting flames from room fires spreading the fire to flats above through this mechanism.

535. The fuel load in the flats continued to contribute to the lateral and vertical spread of the fire and prolonged the blaze. As Professor Jiang described it, after the re-entrant vertical fires developed into room fires, the

various modes of fire spread described above caused the fire to develop into multi-point unit fires.

536. These multi-point room fires were difficult to contain. This may explain why, although the last of the rapid re-entrant fires occurred at 18:32 hours on 26 November 2025, firefighting operations continued until 10:18 hours on 28 November 2025, nearly 40 hours later.

D3. Secondary ignition

537. The issue of secondary ignition is important. As mentioned above, it explains how a small and localised fire developed into a sufficiently large fire to trigger a rapid re-entrant fire. Secondary ignition also explains how the fire spread to different locations along the scaffolding nets, and eventually across multiple buildings.

538. The rapid re-entrant fires only lasted minutes before entering their decay stage. Nevertheless, the secondary ignition of materials enabled decaying fires to spread to new areas, ignite combustibles and potentially trigger the next re-entrant fire.

539. The IFITF's experiments at the Sichuan University of Science and Engineering demonstrate that, even as the fire in a re-entrant began to decay, secondary ignition occurred during tests with safety nets lacking fire-retardant properties. It was observed that fire propagated along non-fire-retardant safety nets, resulting in secondary ignitions at various locations on the scaffolding between 50 and 120 minutes after the re-entrant fire entered the decay stage. The fire would therefore propagate until it encountered and set fire to suitable combustibles, further developing and sustaining the fire.

540. The foam boards on windows also played a role in the fire spread. Experiments conducted by Professors Usmani and Jiang showed that the foam boards would melt and fall off when heated. The foam boards produced burning droplets which assisted secondary ignition, as well as toxic smoke. Professor Yuen also observed that the foam boards, once detached from the windows and fallen, acted as a new source of fire.

541. Professors Usmani and Jiang also observed that the fire spread from the first re-entrant to others within the same building and subsequently to neighbouring buildings because of high-velocity fountains of airborne embers, which were light enough to be carried long distances by high winds without extinguishing. They opined that all of the combustibles (including non-fire-retardant nets) were likely to have contributed to these firebrands.

542. Likewise, the IFITF also considered that the re-entrant fires lifted embers to great heights, allowing them to follow the wind and travel considerable distances before falling. If the re-entrant fires propelled embers and burning debris to other re-entrants, this could trigger another rapid fire spread within those re-entrants.

543. Further, extraneous factors such as the low humidity and high winds on the day further exacerbated the chain of events. The average wind speed recorded at Tai Po Kau at 15:00 hours on 26 November 2025 was approximately 14 km/hour. The wind direction was east to southeast. The winds intensified the fire's progression by supplying additional oxygen to the flames, which increased the fire's heat, and further carried burning fragments of construction materials over considerable distances.

544. In this regard, the CFD simulation conducted by the IFITF also demonstrated the wind-driven ember propagation under the same wind conditions on the day of the fire.

545. During the simulation, wind vector contours at various heights were plotted: 10 m (bottom level), 40 m (middle level), 80 m (top level), 97 m (rooftop level) and 120 m (above the buildings).

546. The wind vector provided valuable insights into the trajectory of flying embers that could ignite new fires. Wang Chi House (Block H) was the only unaffected building in WF Court, a fact that can be explained by the wind profile. As shown in Figure 6-11(a), the re-entrants of building which experienced rapid fire spread are marked with red circles. However, as illustrated by the wind vectors, the wind did not carry embers towards Wang Chi House, which may account for its minimal damage. This can also be seen from the photo in Figure 6-11(d), which shows smoke drifting from Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) in a direction away from Wang Chi House.

547. According to SStnO Hui, he observed the fire spreading to the safety nets on the east façade of Wang Tai House (Block E) at approximately 15:00 hours, marked by a black circle in Figure 6-11(b). This observation also aligned with the wind profile, which suggested that embers were likely carried by the wind towards that façade following the rapid fire spread along the south re-entrant of Wang Cheong House (Block F) at nearly the same time.

548. Wang Kin House (Block D), despite being in the path of flying embers, sustained only minor fire damage. This may be attributed to the recirculation zone formed around the building which likely extended the embers' travel distance, allowing them to cool before reaching the structure and reducing the risk of ignition, as illustrated in Figure 6-11(c).

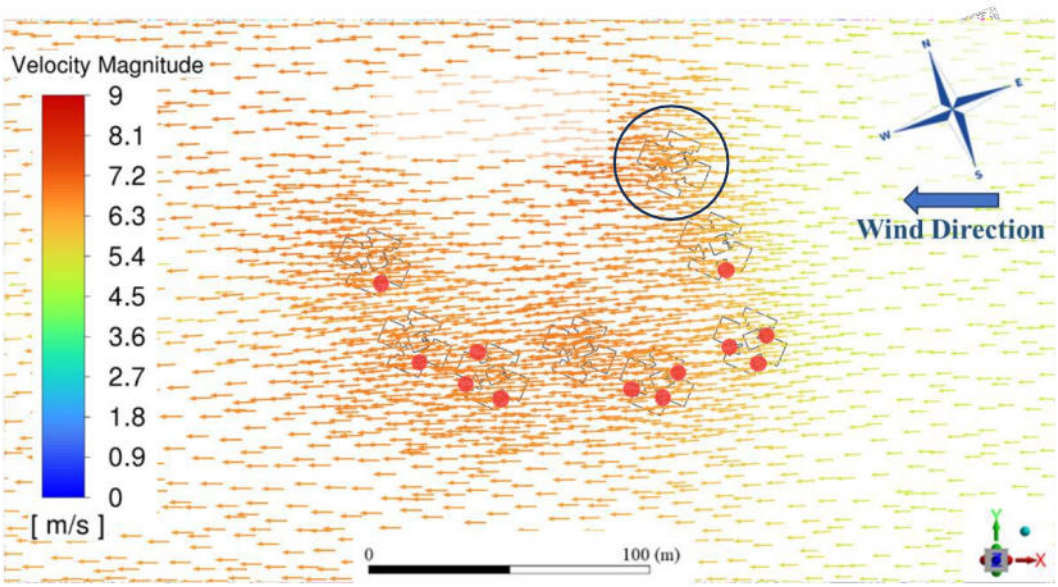


Figure 6-11(a): Wind vector contour (120 m – above building) with rapid fire spread along re-entrants marked

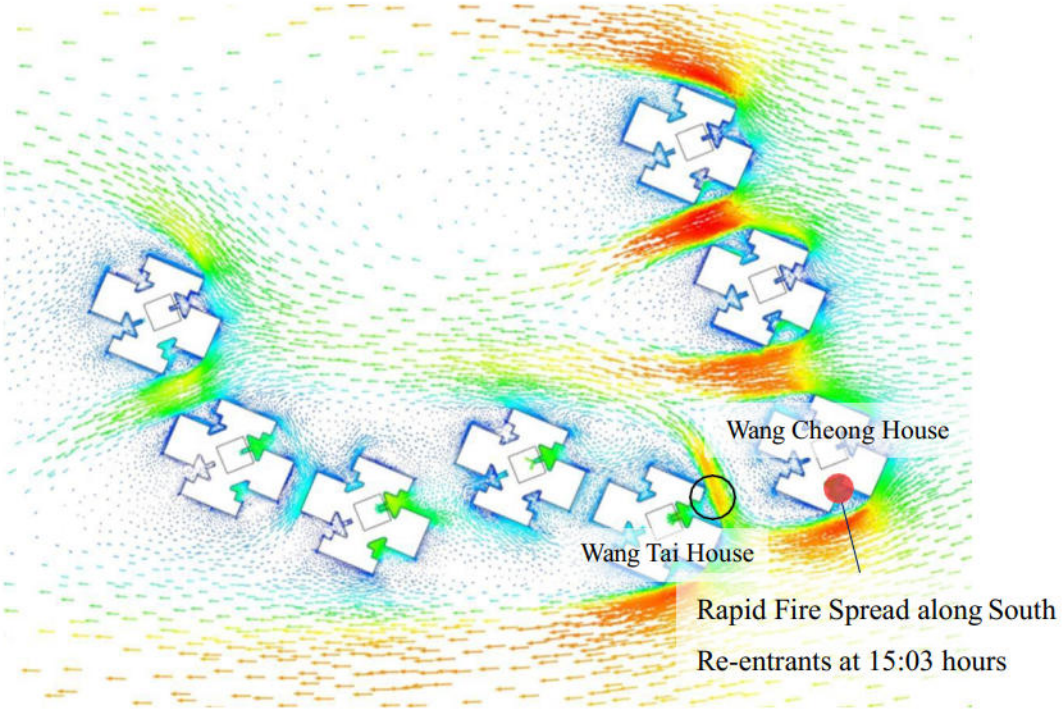


Figure 6-11(b): Wind vector contour at 40 m height

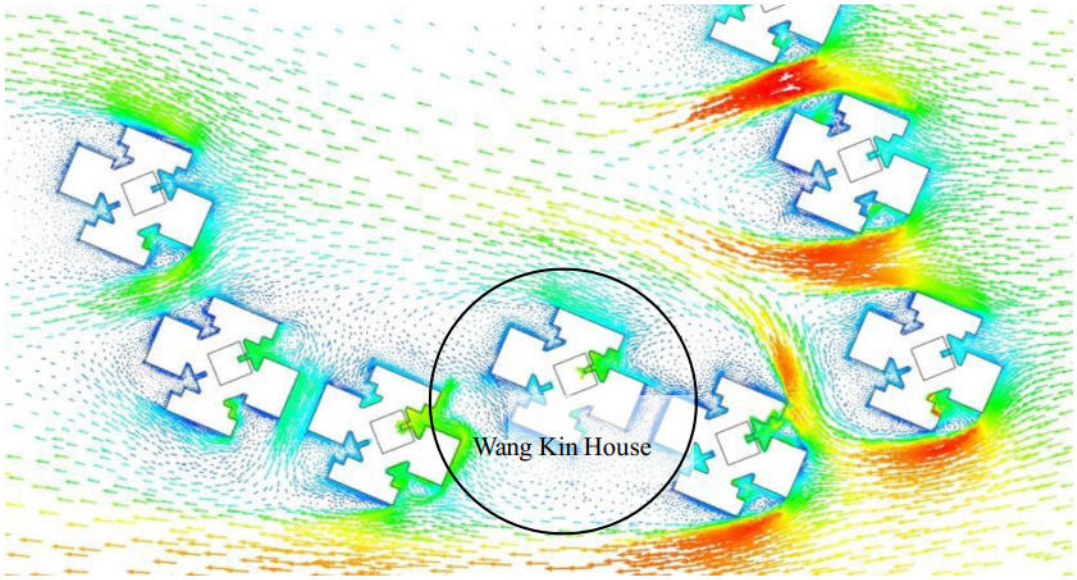


Figure 6-11(c): Wind vector contour at 80 m height



Figure 6-11(d): Photo showing smoke drifting away from Wang Chi House (Block H)

E. CAUSES OF HEAVY CASUALTIES

E1. Factors which led to heavy casualties

549. The IFITF identified several critical factors that led to the heavy casualties. Most of these factors reduced the time for evacuation, especially in Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E):

(i) The extreme rate of vertical spread of fire increased the risk of entrapment, as dense smoke obstructed evacuation efforts.

(ii) Flaming bamboo and other debris piled up on the ground level, blocking building entrances.

(iii) Means of escape were also compromised, as openable lift lobby windows and access openings in the staircases allowed smoke to infiltrate the means of escape at an early stage.

550. The reasons for the rapid fire spread have been addressed. The role of the access openings in the staircases warrants specific mention:

(i) The majority of deaths were caused by the inhalation of smoke, rather than by burns or exposure to heat. Consistently, many fatalities were found in corridors and staircases that had no combustible fuel to sustain flames.

(ii) The evidence of residents shows that the staircases of Wang Cheong House (Block F) were completely filled with thick smoke by approximately 14:58 hours, cutting off their primary means of escape. By that point, the available safe

egress time ("ASET") for occupants in that building had effectively been reduced to zero.

(iii) Post-fire inspections of the flame and soot deposition patterns near the fire-rated staircase doors revealed that the doors were closed and had withstood the flames in the common corridors. The smoke in the staircases was therefore the direct result of the access openings.

(iv) The evidence from the IFITF is that the fire-rated windows in the staircase of Wang Cheong House (Block F), which had been installed as part of the Works at WF Court, were able to withstand the rapid vertical fire in the re-entrant.[77] Fire-rated windows would have maintained the staircase at an internal temperature of 56°C notwithstanding that the re-entrant fire reached a temperature of 1,061°C. In contrast, for windows which had been replaced with an aluminium composite panel, the internal temperature reached 605°C.

(v) The evidence of the Committee's experts was to like effect. Their CFD simulations modelling the staircases with the access openings showed that smoke entered the staircases "*within minutes of fire development*", and tenability limits were exceeded one minute later. Smoke could infiltrate the staircase through the gaps and holes in the movable boards for access openings, even before they were completely burned out. They concluded that "*both the wooden board*

77 The only broken fire-rated windows were the result of steps taken by firefighters to vent smoke from the staircase in their later firefighting operation.

and aluminium composite panel are unsuitable for protecting the staircase openings".

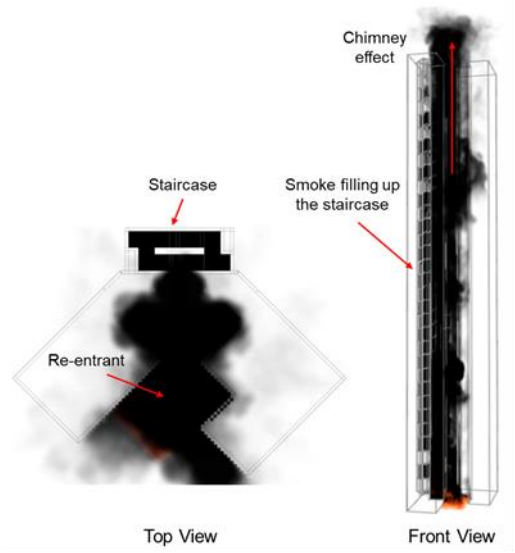


Figure 6-12: CFD simulation of smoke infiltrating staircases

551. Other critical factors which affected the residents' awareness of the fire include the opaque foam boards that covered their units' windows and the shutdown of the FAS. These factors delayed the response and evacuation by the residents.

552. As described by the IFITF in its Final Report, these factors resulted in an "*extremely limited escape window for evacuees, particularly for those occupants at Wang Cheong House and Wang Tai House*".

E2. Estimated time for escape

553. The factors identified by the IFITF to have led to the heavy casualties can be analysed with reference to the concepts of ASET and required safe egress time (RSET). Assistant Director Yiu Men Yeung (witness no 78) of the FSD, who is also the leader of the IFITF, explained

that ASET/RSET calculations are only undertaken for buildings adopting a performance-based design, where it is necessary to demonstrate that occupants can escape safely in a fire. Nevertheless, both the IFITF and the Committee's experts have referred to the concept, which helpfully illustrates the time available to the residents to evacuate during a fire.

554. For any given fire, a successful evacuation can only be achieved if the total time required for evacuation – detection of the fire, decision making and physical movement – is less than ASET, being the time before evacuation pathways become untenable or impassable.

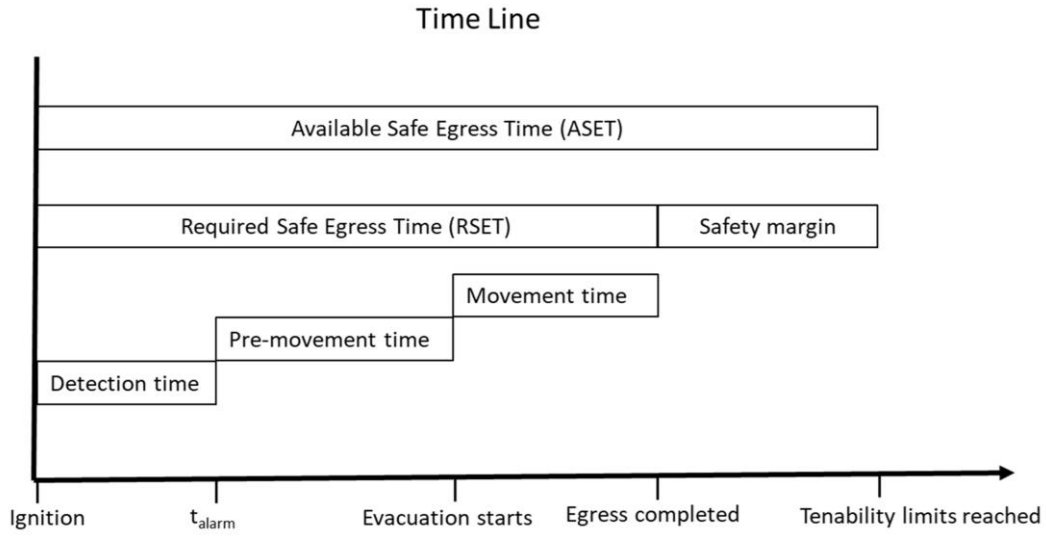


Figure 6-13: Timeline analysis illustrating the ASET/RSET concept, taken from the Committee experts' presentation at the hearing on 25 June 2026

555. In determining the probable time available to the residents to evacuate from the various buildings, the Legal Team has made a well-reasoned estimation based on the evidence summarised in Section D of Chapter 5.

556. According to the Legal Team, the means of escape likely became smoke-logged for each block (and ground exits became obstructed in the case of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E)) at the following times:

(i) Wang Cheong House (Block F): approximately 14:58 hours when the first re-entrant fire was fully developed and the staircases and corridors had become smoke-logged, and at the latest by around 15:05 hours when both ground-level escape routes were blocked by burning debris.

(ii) Wang Tai House (Block E): approximately 15:17 hours when staircases and corridors had become smoke-logged and at the latest by around 15:30 hours when both ground-level escape routes were blocked by burning debris.

(iii) Wang Sun House (Block C): sometime after 15:22 hours, when the CCTV video feed terminated, and at the latest approximately 15:45 hours when corridors were reported by firefighters to be smoke-logged.

(iv) Wang Tao House (Block B): approximately 16:09 hours when the CCTV video feed terminated and residents were seen covering their faces, and around when residents became trapped in their flats.

(v) Wang Shing House (Block G): approximately 16:21 hours when corridors and staircases had become smoke-logged.

(vi) Wang Yan House (Block A): approximately 18:32 hours, when the final rapid re-entrant fire occurred.

(vii) Wang Kin House (Block D): the block experienced no rapid fire spread and evacuation might have remained tenable for substantially longer if not throughout the entire firefighting process. Unlike for other blocks where CCTV footage cut off in the early period of the fire, the Police were able to recover continuous CCTV footage from some cameras on Wang Kin House up until the next day and firefighters could be observed entering and exiting freely.

(viii) Wang Chi House (Block H): not affected by the fire.

557. Since there is insufficient information to undertake a tenability analysis from a fire-engineering perspective, the estimates made by the Legal Team are largely drawn from CCTV footage and witness evidence and may not accurately reflect the actual tenability of the means of escape. Nevertheless, they provide a basis for understanding the very stark differences in the casualties across the different blocks at WF Court.

558. The Legal Team sought to explain the heavy loss of life in Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) as follows:

(i) Reckoned from the moment the FSD was first informed of the fire at 14:51 hours to the moment burning debris obstructed the ground-level escape routes, residents had at most 14 minutes to escape from Wang Cheong House (Block F), and at most 39 minutes to escape from Wang Tai House (Block E).

(ii) In reality, the staircases and corridors were smoke-logged even earlier and might have become untenable before the ground entrances and exits were obstructed:

(a) The Legal Team estimated that the Wang Cheong House (Block F) staircase became smoke-logged at approximately 14:58 hours, around seven minutes from the initial 999 call. Had all the access openings been replaced with fire-rated staircase windows as planned, occupants in Wang Cheong House would have had another seven minutes to escape before the front entrance was blocked by debris at around 15:05 hours.

(b) Likewise, for Wang Tai House (Block E), the evidence shows that the staircases had become smoke-logged at around 15:17 hours. This was unlikely to have happened had the staircase windows not been altered into access openings. Had the staircases remained free of smoke, residents using the staircase leading to the rear exit would have had a further 13 minutes to escape (the rear exit was not blocked until 15:30 hours), and those using the staircase to the front entrance would have had a further four minutes (the front entrance was engulfed in flames at around 15:21 hours).[78] It follows that some of the occupants who perished in the staircases might well have escaped had the staircases remained passable for those additional minutes.

(iii) The window to escape became narrower because, with the fire alarms inoperative and foam boards blocking their view, residents were not even aware of the fire when the clock began to run:

78 The time shown in the CCTV footage was approximately two minutes behind reference time.

(a) Had they not been switched off, the fire alarms would have been activated for Wang Cheong House (Block F) at the latest by 14:54 hours by a resident on 15/F, or even earlier by Madam Chung Sui Ha.

(b) For Wang Tai House (Block E), the fire alarms should have been activated once it was apparent that the fire was spreading from Wang Cheong House (Block F), around 15:00 hours when the first flaming droplets reached Wang Tai House. Had that been done, residents of Wang Tai House would have had around 15 to 20 minutes to escape.

559. Wang Sun House (Block C) also suffered severe internal fire damage, and Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Yan House (Block A) had severely damaged flats adjacent to the re-entrants that had rapid vertical fires. Yet, there were two fatalities in Wang Sun House (Block C), two fatalities in Wang Tao House and no fatalities in Wang Yan House.

560. On the estimates set out above, Wang Sun House (Block C) residents had up to 54 minutes from the first 999 call to evacuate. In a process where every minute mattered, this additional time likely made a difference. The evidence before the Committee summarised in Chapter 5 above suggests that this additional time enabled Wang Sun House residents to learn of the fire and its spread from block to block through news reports and urgent calls from family members and neighbours. It is also significant that Wang Sun House was one of only two blocks in which fire alarms sounded. These features may explain why residents in over 70 units at Wang Sun House were able to escape and why two residents unfortunately perished despite every flat in the block sustaining some amount of fire damage.

561. The IFITF also attributes the low number of fatalities in Wang Sun House (Block C) to the fact that the vertical fire spread in the re-entrant connected to the staircase only occurred at 16:41 hours, nearly two hours after the initial report of fire. It follows that until then, the staircases at Wang Sun House may have been less smoke-logged compared to Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) which experienced re-entrant fires adjacent to the staircases at earlier points of the fire.

562. However, the evidence suggests that corridors on multiple floors of Wang Sun House (Block C) became smoke-logged at around 15:45 hours, even before the occurrence of vertical fire spread. Residents who observed smoke-logged corridors might not have dared to venture out of their flats and therefore would not know that the staircases were tenable. Furthermore, the evidence before the Committee does not suggest that residents were still able to escape from Wang Sun House after 15:45 hours, with the last known escapes from Wang Sun House being at around 15:35 hours as described in Chapter 5.

563. Residents in all other blocks had more than an hour (and in most cases considerably longer) to be warned about the fire and to evacuate. This readily explains the smaller number of fatalities in these blocks.

564. In the opinion of the Committee, the Legal Team has made a very careful analysis, based on the existing available evidence, on the probable time available to the residents to escape from the various blocks in WF Court. The Committee will therefore adopt such analysis as part of the findings of this Inquiry.

565. These time estimates concern the feasibility of evacuation through means of escape. Depending on the situation in a particular room or compartment within the building, it may be possible for residents to remain inside the buildings for a longer period. The Committee has heard

evidence of residents who managed, through a combination of dynamic decision-making and luck, to avoid smoke indoors for long enough to be rescued by firefighters.

E3. Fatalities in blocks which had more time to evacuate

566. The feasibility of escape for individual occupants also depended on their age, mobility, health condition and awareness. While occupants of Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Sun House (Block C) and Wang Shing House (Block G) had more time to evacuate, there were nonetheless fatalities in those blocks.

567. There were two fatalities in Wang Tao House (Block B):

(i) Madam Lee Lai Man (aged 75) and her husband Mr Chu Siu Hung (aged 75), who lived in Flat 2206, discovered the fire at around 15:30 hours and decided to await rescue in their flat. Mr Chu survived the smoke and was rescued when he walked down to G/F the next day, but his wife sadly succumbed to smoke inhalation.

(ii) Madam Ho Mee Bo (aged 89) lived in Flat 2207. She was in a wheelchair and succumbed to inhalation of smoke and ischaemic heart disease. Her flat was likely infiltrated with smoke as her domestic helper, Madam Supartini, had lost consciousness while awaiting rescue from the same flat.

568. There were two fatalities in Wang Sun House (Block C):

(i) Madam Ieong Vun Ieng (aged 83) lived in Flat 1405. As explained in Chapter 5, Madam Ieong was trapped in her flat

by around 15:48 hours when the common corridor on her floor was already smoke-logged. Her flat was also severely damaged by the fire.

(ii) Mr Hung King Leong (aged 40) lived in Flat 604. His flat suffered extremely severe fire damage and his remains were eventually discovered.

569. There was one fatality in Wang Shing House (Block G): Mr Chan Hon Bill, who was a 77-year-old man living in Flat 2802.[79] His cause of death was identified as inhalation of fire fumes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

F. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON CAUSES OF FIRE, FIRE SPREAD AND HEAVY CASUALTIES

570. Having examined all the circumstances leading to the fire, its rapid spread and heavy casualties, the Committee can summarise them into the following factors:

(i) smoking by workers at the site;

(ii) design of the re-entrants in the buildings;

(iii) unfavourable weather conditions accelerating the fire spread;

(iv) the presence of combustible envelope such as scaffolding nets, foam boards, wooden planks, toe boards and canvases, contributing to fire propagation;

79 See: para 752(iii)(b) of Chapter 7.

(v) the use of non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets and canvases;

(vi) secondary ignitions caused by wind-driven embers, falling debris and flaming droplets, very much caused by the use of non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets;

(vii) the creation of access openings in the staircases;

(viii) the non-functioning of the FASs; and

(ix) fire load inside the residential units prolonging the fire duration.

571. As observed by the IFITF, the aforesaid factors interacted and amplified one another, creating conditions highly conducive to fire development, particularly during the rapid fire spread at the re-entrants of the buildings.

572. One of these factors, weather conditions, is certainly beyond human control.

573. Another factor which cannot be controlled or removed is the presence of fire load inside the residential units (e.g. furniture and sundries, clothing). After all, the buildings were still occupied by residents during the execution of BMR works.

574. A further factor which may not involve human error or fault is the design of the re-entrants. Hong Kong is a densely populated city. To maximise the utility of the buildings and the use of space, it is not uncommon for re-entrants to be designed like those at WF Court. Whether there is a better building design or configuration of the shape of the

re-entrants, which can both maximise the use of space and avoid the presence of chimney-like structures at the same time, is beyond the scope of the present Inquiry. Re-entrants by themselves are not unsafe, and it is only under certain conditions that the design would facilitate the spread of fire in these structures. The Committee's work proceeds on the basis that the public would have to live with such re-entrant designs. But, with the painful lessons learnt from the fire in WF Court, the Government and the public should realise that re-entrants can create fire risk under certain conditions and they should pay particular attention to the fire safety issues relating to the re-entrants. Architects are also encouraged to explore whether the designs of the buildings and the configurations of the shapes of the re-entrants can be improved in the future having regard to the lessons learnt from this tragic event, in particular the potential threat of stack effect (or chimney effect) along vertical re-entrants in case of a building fire.

575. All other remaining factors involve human fault, error, or oversight of some kind. Without these human factors, the fire would not have occurred, or at the very least, it would not have resulted in so many casualties.

576. These human factors relate to:

(i) the behaviour of workers at BMR works site such as smoking and leaving garbage accumulated on, for example, the flat roofs of the buildings and scaffolding work platforms;

(ii) the use of unsafe building materials such as non-fire-retardant scaffolding nets and canvases, foam boards, and to a lesser extent wooden planks and toe boards;

(iii) the adoption of unsafe building procedures such as the creation of access openings in the escape staircases; and

(iv) the improper operation of the FSIs by unqualified persons.

577. The experts' analysis of these factors is of particular importance to the Committee's mandate to examine the responsibilities of the various parties for these human faults, errors and oversights, and the adequacy of the standards and supervision for large-scale BMR works and the effectiveness of testing and verification systems, which will be addressed in the later parts of this Report.

CHAPTER 7
REVIEW OF THE FIREFIGHTING AND EVACUATION OPERATIONS AND THE PROCEDURES HANDLING EMERGENCY CALLS AND REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

A. OVERVIEW

578. In this Chapter, the Committee will review the firefighting and evacuation efforts made by various departments in response to the fire in WF Court and the procedures in handling the emergency calls and requests for assistance in this tragic incident.

579. In reviewing the firefighting efforts and tactics of the FSD on the day of the incident, the Committee has been assisted by the two experts engaged by the Committee, in particular Professor Usmani who has given expert evidence on this particular issue.

580. The Committee acknowledges that Professor Usmani has no previous experience as a firefighter himself. However, Professor Usmani is an internationally reputable fire safety engineering expert who has impressive teaching and research qualifications and experience. He has published many academic and research articles on the subject. Apart from receiving many awards and recognitions in his field of expertise, he has also participated in many international conferences and projects. Furthermore, being a building sciences expert with local experience, he has particular knowledge and expertise about the local building industry and local building procedures. Indeed, the fact that Professor Usmani is not a firefighter himself makes him more independent in giving his objective opinion on the firefighting efforts of the FSD during this tragic incident.

581. This Chapter will address the following issues:

(i) Section B: The deployments of the FSD and the Police for the firefighting and rescuing operations in response to the fire;

(ii) Section C: The firefighting tactics and deployment of resources of the rescuing authorities;

(iii) Section D: The evacuation operation and procedures of the rescuing authorities;

(iv) Section E: The procedures handling emergency calls and assistance requests; and

(v) Section F: Concluding remarks on the aforesaid issues.

582. The circumstances leading to the death of Fireman Ho and the review of the procedures, apparatus and equipment for the protection of FSD crew members will be addressed separately in the next Chapter.

B. THE DEPLOYMENTS OF THE FSD AND THE POLICE FOR THE FIREFIGHTING AND RESCUING OPERATIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE FIRE

B1. Initial deployment (14:51 to 14:55 hours)

583. The first 999 call was placed by a passerby at 14:50 hours. It was answered by a Police call operator at 14:50:07 hours and connected to the FSD's Fire Services Communications Centre ("FSCC") 28 seconds later, at 14:50:35 hours.

584. At 14:51:17 hours, the FSCC dispatched seven fire appliances to the scene of the fire, comprising one Hydraulic Platform, three Major Pumps, two Light Rescue Units and one 37-metre Turntable Ladder from Tai Po, Tai Po East, Sha Tin and Ma On Shan Fire Stations, the incident being logged as a "*fire involving scaffolding on external wall with explosion occurred*".

585. This turnout exceeded the standard pre-determined attendance:

(i) Pursuant to Chapter 41 (Mobilizing and Communications - Mobilizing) of the FSD General Orders, the pre-determined attendance for No 1 alarm fire calls in urban residential areas is normally four fire appliances, comprising one Hydraulic Platform, one Major Pump, one Turntable Ladder or Aerial Ladder Platform and one Light Rescue Unit or Major Rescue Unit.

(ii) Under the contingency plan formulated by the FSD for the Works at WF Court, one additional Major Pump and one additional Light Rescue Unit would be dispatched to any fire calls at WF Court. Relevantly, the contingency plan stated that "*[as] from year of 2024, high occupancy would be remained throughout the major maintenance works take part, hence high evacuation risk is anticipated in case of any emergency*". The fire crews of these two additional appliances would be responsible for "*massive evacuation with crowd control due to high occupancy of the concerned domestic buildings*".

(iii) One further Major Pump was dispatched due to the notified shutdown of the FHHRSs at WF Court in accordance with the Fire Services Departmental Policy Instructions.

586. At 14:54:40 hours, another four fire appliances were dispatched by the FSCC to the scene, including one Search and Rescue ("SAR") Team comprising one Hydraulic Platform, one Light Rescue Unit and one Reserve Heavy Pump. This is a standard procedure under the FSD General Orders when a building fire is reported from two or more callers.

587. In total, 11 fire appliances and one ambulance, crewed by 55 FSD personnel, were dispatched within the first five minutes of the FSD receiving the initial 999 call.

B2. Initial firefighting efforts (14:56 hours to 15:02 hours)

588. The first fire appliance to arrive at the scene was a Hydraulic Platform from Tai Po Fire Station. It was crewed by one Senior Fireman and four Firemen, under the command of SStnO Hui. The crew arrived at the roundabout of WF Court at 14:56:22 hours. The remaining six fire appliances of the initial deployment arrived between 14:57:30 and 15:04:00 hours.

589. In the opinion of Professor Usmani, the five-minute response time was both effective and efficient. The Committee agrees with such assessment.

590. Upon arriving at the scene, SStnO Hui assumed the position of Incident Commander in accordance with the FSD protocol. SStnO Hui gave evidence that at the time, there was no fire or smoke on the building façade facing the roundabout. He was led by a passerby to the rear façade

of Wang Cheong House (Block F) via the pathway adjacent to Wang Shing House (Block G), upon which he saw the scaffolding structure well alight, with flames reaching 8/F or 9/F.

591. At 14:57 hours, SStnO Hui reported his observations back to the FSCC. His message reads "*Scaffolding of about 8m in width and 30 m in height at the external wall (towards Island House Lane side) of an [Reinforced Cement Concrete] domestic building of 31 residential floors of about 30 x 25 m (Wang Cheong House) well alight. One covering jet in use at open ground outside Wang Cheong House*".

592. According to SStnO Hui, he directed the fire crews to lay two water jets for firefighting at the initial seat of the fire. At around 14:59 hours, he then returned to the roundabout outside Wang Cheong House (Block F), where he saw a large plume of smoke rising above Wang Cheong House. He also observed the fire spreading from the rear façade to the west façade of Wang Cheong House and the east façade of Wang Tai House (Block E) at around 15:00 hours.

593. At 15:02 hours, SStnO Hui upgraded the fire to No 3 alarm. He explained in evidence that he did so because by then smoke and fire had almost engulfed the entirety of Wang Cheong House (Block F), and was at risk of spreading to other buildings. Furthermore, debris had begun to block the entrance of Wang Cheong House, trapping occupants inside. He therefore assessed that the initial turnout was insufficient to deal with a fire of that scale.

594. In accordance with the pre-determined attendance under Chapter 41 of the FSD General Orders, eight further fire appliances, including one 55-metre Turntable Ladder and two Mobile Command Units, were dispatched to the scene at 15:03:32 hours. Assistant Divisional

Officer Cheung Lok Hang ("ADO Cheung") (witness no 37), Station Commander of Tai Po Fire Station, was also dispatched to the scene.

595. Before the raising of the fire alarm to No 3, there were already 61 FS members deployed at the scene, which equals around 80% of required manpower deployment in a No 3 alarm fire (i.e. 79 FS members).

B3. No 3 alarm (15:02 to 15:35 hours)

596. While ADO Cheung proceeded to the scene, SStnO Hui remained as Incident Commander for the initial stage of the No 3 alarm fire. SStnO Hui explained that at around 15:05 hours, he deployed three additional water jets in the roundabout facing Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) and directed firefighters to clear the debris blocking the entrance of Wang Cheong House and assist with the evacuation of residents. At around 15:20 hours, he instructed the crew of the newly arrived 37-metre Turntable Ladder from Tai Po East Fire Station to apply a water monitor to Wang Cheong House and Wang Tai House. The water jet covered Wang Shing House (Block G), which was by then alight.

597. ADO Cheung arrived at the scene at 15:19:49 hours and assumed the role of Incident Commander at 15:19:58 hours. He testified that he met SStnO Hui at the roundabout near Wang Tai House (Block E) at 15:23 hours where SStnO Hui briefed him on the firefighting efforts, including a Mayday message which SStnO Hui received at around 15:22 hours. ADO Cheung instructed SStnO Hui to continue firefighting efforts and the Mayday rescue operation, and instructed crew members to lay an additional two hoses for firefighting at Wang Kin House (Block D) and Wang Sun House (Block C), bringing the total up to seven hoses.

598. A 55-metre Turntable Ladder from Sha Tin Fire Station also arrived on the scene at 15:23 hours. It was positioned outside Wang Tai House (Block E) on Tai Po Road (Yuen Chau Tsai).

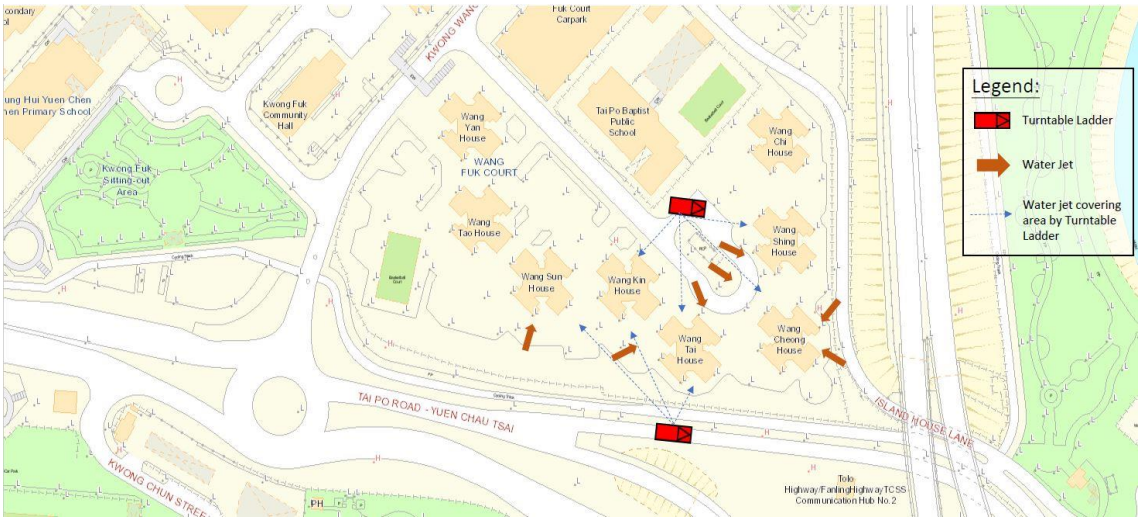


Figure 7-1: Map showing location and placement of fire hoses, water jets and Turntable Ladders at around 15:23 hours

599. In parallel to the developments at the scene, the DFS was informed of the fire at 15:14 hours and activated the Director's Command Post ("DCP") at 15:20 hours. Furthermore, the DFS instructed the mobilisation of about 80 uniformed members from non-operational units to set up a Support Centre with 18 dedicated telephone lines to operate a call-back mechanism to collect updated situation of affected residents and provide on-going safety guidance, as described further below.[80]

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80 Pursuant to the Temporary Operational Guidelines No 05/2024 which took effect on 1 December 2024, the call-back mechanism is operated whenever two or more SAR teams attend the same incident. According to Mr Wong Sze Lut Sunny, DCFO (Operational Support and Professional Development) ("DCFO Sunny Wong") (witness no 40) of the FSD, the call-back mechanism is established to update the situation of persons seeking assistance and to provide those persons with safety guidance. The SAR Team Leader (Rescue Officer) will be informed of any updates for his adjustments to SAR priorities.

600. DCFO Fok Chun Ming (witness no 58), in the capacity of Acting Assistant Director (Corporate Strategy), commanded the DCP on the day of the fire. He testified that the DCP served as a supreme commanding post of the FSD for the DFS to coordinate the FSD's response and liaise with other Government bureaux and departments. Due to the gravity of the situation, the DCP was directly activated at the Tier 2 level (entailing two senior officers, five subordinate officers and four other members) and was commanded by an Assistant Director (being two ranks more senior to a Senior Divisional Officer, who would typically be in charge of the DCP).

601. Upon the activation of the DCP, the DCP deployed 10 additional SAR Teams comprising 20 fire appliances with 105 personnel to handle the surge in assistance calls.

602. The FSD informed the Water Supplies Department ("WSD") of the fire at 15:19:12 hours, following which duty staff from the WSD were deployed to the scene. Upon the arrival of the duty staff at 16:00 hours, they opened all relevant water main valves. Inspections of the street hydrants performed by the WSD recorded a continuous water supply of 7 to 7.5 bar, which was substantially higher than the FSD's minimum requirement of 1.7 bar.

603. At 15:29 hours, Divisional Officer ("DO") Lam Ho Chun ("DO Lam") (witness no 38), Deputy Divisional Commander (New Territories East) arrived at the scene and assumed the role of Incident Commander in accordance with the procedures in Chapter 41 of the FSD General Orders. In his oral evidence, DO Lam described the scene at the time as unprecedented in its severity, with three blocks completely engulfed by smoke and three other blocks alight. Bamboo members and other debris continuously fell from height and pieces of scaffolding net drifted in the air.

604. DO Lam was briefed by ADO Cheung at 15:32 hours and upgraded the fire to a No 4 alarm at 15:34 hours. DO Lam explained that he decided to upgrade the fire because the resources available to him at the time were insufficient to handle the strength, magnitude and size of the fire, as well as the continuously increasing number of assistance requests received. He also considered that a higher level of commanding authority was needed to handle the situation. Under Chapter 41 of the FSD General Orders, a No 4 alarm fire is commanded by a Chief Fire Officer or a DCFO, as opposed to a No 3 alarm fire which is commanded by a Senior Divisional Officer or a DO.

605. Specialists teams were dispatched to attend the incident after the fire was raised to a No 3 alarm, including Compartment Fire Specialists; Communications Support Team (this team was first dispatched at 15:55 hours after the fire was upgrade to a No 4 alarm); Highrise Building Firefighting Specialists; Breathing Apparatus Unit; Tactical Support Unit; and Unmanned Aircraft System Team ("UAST").

B4. Initial stages of the No 4 alarm (15:35 to 16:35 hours)

606. DCFO Wong King Man (witness no 39) arrived at the scene at 15:35 hours, one minute after the fire was upgraded to a No 4 alarm. He testified that, although officers of his rank were not required to attend No 3 alarm fires, his practice was to attend all No 3 alarm fires within his area, so as to be in a position to assume the role of Incident Commander as soon as possible should the fire be upgraded to a No 4 alarm. He accordingly set off for the scene upon being notified of the fire by the FSCC at 15:11 hours, while the fire was still a No 3 alarm.

607. Upon arriving at the scene and assessing the situation, DCFO Wong King Man instructed the FSCC to issue the first press release regarding the fire at 15:38 hours. After enquiring with the FSCC regarding

the number of Turntable Ladders dispatched, he ordered the deployment of three additional Turntable Ladders to the scene (bringing the total number dispatched to six).

608. DCFO Wong King Man formally assumed the role of Incident Commander at 15:50:51 hours. In accordance with the FSD procedure, he implemented the Incident Command System for the No 4 alarm fire. At around 16:05 hours, he was briefed by DO Lam that Fireman Ho had been located at the open ground in front of the entrance of Wang Tai House (Block E).

609. Meanwhile, more senior officers arrived at the scene. At 15:50 hours, Chief Fire Officer Tang Wing Wah, Assistant Director in charge of the New Territories North Command ("AD Tang") (witness no 61), arrived at the scene. Deputy Director (Operations) ("DD(Ops)") Derek Armstrong Chan ("DD(Ops) Chan") (witness no 60) arrived at 16:10 hours.

610. The following steps were taken by AD Tang and DD(Ops) Chan over the remaining course of the No 4 alarm fire.

611. At 16:13 hours, AD Tang directed DO Lam to take a roll call to ensure that no further crew members were unaccounted for after Fireman Ho was located. The roll call was completed without incident.

612. At 16:18 hours, AD Tang assumed the role of Incident Commander. On the instructions of DD(Ops) Chan, he directed the FSCC to dispatch all available senior officers from the New Territories North and New Territories South commands to the scene.

613. At 16:23 hours, AD Tang assigned DCFO Wong King Man to be the Rescue Officer in charge of all SAR operations.

614. At 16:28 hours, the Compartment Fire Specialists team arrived at the scene and were deployed to assist in the firefighting operations at Wang Cheong House (Block F).

615. From around 16:15 hours, the FSD deployed drones with livestreaming and thermal imaging capabilities to provide coverage of the fire.

B5. Later stages of the No 4 alarm (16:35 to 18:22 hours)

616. At 16:35 hours, DD(Ops) Chan instructed AD Tang to implement a building-by-building command strategy by setting up eight operation sectors, each corresponding to one block at WF Court. Each operation sector was commanded by a senior officer (i.e. a Senior Divisional Officer or DO) responsible for firefighting within that building, and another senior officer as SAR leader. DD(Ops) Chan testified that he decided to adopt this command structure in light of the unprecedented spread of the fire across multiple high-rise residential blocks, with each block exhibiting its own fire and smoke behaviour and requiring differing levels of assistance.

617. At 16:44 hours, AD Tang requested the FSCC to dispatch another four fire appliances and one Turntable Ladder. He also requested a further Breathing Apparatus Pod at 17:24 hours to provide additional breathing apparatus cylinders and breathing apparatus sets.

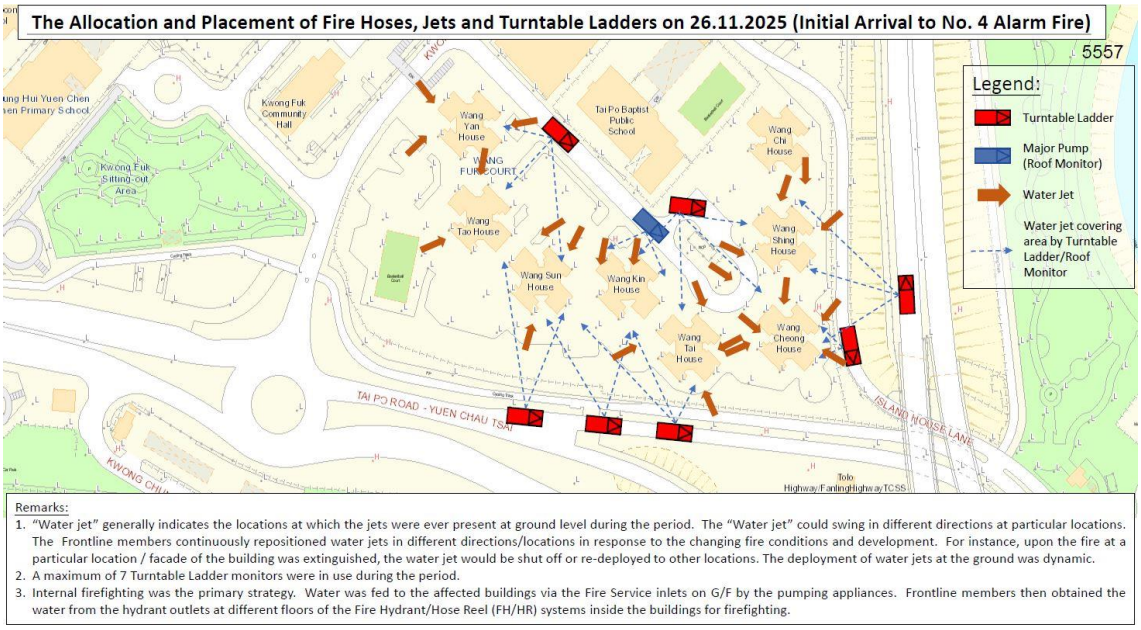


Figure 7-2: Map showing location and placement of fire hoses, water jets and Turntable Ladders at around 18:00 hours

618. The FSD was only able to make limited firefighting progress in this period in light of the extremely challenging environment at the scene. The Incident Commanders all testified that the debris continuously falling from height posed great difficulty for their firefighting efforts. AD Tang explained that the falling debris threatened the physical safety of firefighters and, when accumulated on the ground, prevented the placement of aerial appliances at the emergency vehicular access ("EVA") around each block, thereby limiting the number of aerial appliances that could be used at any time and the effectiveness of appliances which could be used. Multiple fire appliances were also struck and damaged by the falling debris.

619. The internal environment of each block was equally hostile:

(i) In the initial stages of firefighting, firefighters who attempted to enter Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) were forced to retreat due to intense heat and smoke conditions, and only narrowly avoided being blocked by fallen debris and flames.

(ii) Progress was also slowed by the smoke-logged staircases and by the fires on the lower floors, which had to be brought under control before firefighters could advance upwards, lest their retreat routes be cut off.

620. Under these circumstances, it was not until 17:30 hours, some two and a half hours after the FSD's initial attendance, that the FSD was able to clear a passage up to 2/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F). Once the passage was cleared, firefighters rescued three residents from Flat 202 at 17:40 hours.

B6. No 5 alarm (18:22 hours onwards)

621. At 18:22 hours, DD(Ops) Chan upgraded the fire to a No 5 alarm. It was the first No 5 alarm fire in Hong Kong since 2008.

622. DD(Ops) Chan explained that the upgrade was not required for the purpose of deploying further resources. By that time, a total of 116 fire appliances and 55 ambulances with 718 FS members had been dispatched to the scene. The number of FS members was approximately 6.5 times the pre-determined attendance of a No 5 alarm fire. Rather, the primary objective of the upgrade to a No 5 alarm was to enhance the command authority so that he could personally take control of firefighting

efforts. DD(Ops) Chan explained that 18:22 hours was a suitable time to upgrade because of the increasing severity of the situation coupled with the onset of darkness, which increased the risks faced by frontline personnel.

623. DD(Ops) Chan reported in the FSD's incident occurrence log at 18:30 hours that firefighters were tackling blazes across all seven blocks. Firefighting was in progress at G/F and the external walls of Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Tao House (Block B), on G/F of Wang Sun House (Block C), on G/F of Wang Kin House (Block D), at G/F to 6/F of Wang Tai House (Block E), at G/F to 2/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F), and at G/F to 1/F of Wang Shing House (Block G). Firefighters were also applying a covering jet at ground level of Wang Shing House to prevent fire spread to Wang Chi House (Block H).

624. Following the upgrade to a No 5 alarm fire, firefighters succeeded in conducting several snatch rescues of individual occupants at higher floors despite the conditions at lower floors remaining severe. For example, firefighters succeeded in rescuing Mr George Cheung, his wife Madam Liu Chunyu and their neighbour Madam Yip Kam Fong from Flat 1006 of Wang Tai House (Block E) between 19:30 hours and 20:00 hours, and rescued Madam Sin Sin Hing from Flat 1406 at Wang Tai House at around 21:00 hours.

625. At around 22:00 hours, an attempt was made to secure access to 10/F of Wang Tai House (Block E) from the building exterior using a Turntable Ladder, to establish a bridgehead where firefighters could be re-supplied with breathing apparatus and equipment. However, the bridgehead could not be maintained due to reignition of lower floor fires and an escalation in heat and smoke conditions. Firefighters eventually had to retreat for their personal safety.

626. The non-functioning FHHRSs meant that the FS booster pumps across all blocks were non-operational. This added to the challenges of internal firefighting. Water was pumped by fire appliances on the ground level into the buildings through FS inlets. However, the failure of the FS booster pumps limited the water pressure for firefighting on upper floors. As a result, firefighters had to carry compact portable booster pumps each weighing 80 kg while ascending the staircases to upper floors to ensure that water pressure remained adequate at higher levels.

627. The IFITF opined that the frontline personnel successfully navigated the difficulties posed by the shutdown of the FHHRSs, such that it had a minimal impact on the firefighting operations. The Committee has no reason to doubt such assessment.

628. The evidence shows that firefighters made every effort, on some occasions even placing their own safety at risk, to save others. DD(Ops) Chan and DO (Breathing Apparatus) Tung Wing Kei ("DO Tung") (witness no 59) referred to instances of firefighters holding off activating their breathing apparatus until absolutely necessary after entering the scene of the fire, in order to conserve the air supply. Consistent with this, the breathing apparatus logs produced by the FSD showed fire crews exceeding the rated working durations of their sets. In one instance, a crew member was deployed for 47 minutes on a cylinder rated for 29 minutes of working time.

629. By 22:30 hours, 174 fire appliances (including eight Turntable Ladders), 47 ambulances and 989 personnel had been deployed to the scene. The number of personnel was nine times the pre-determined attendance for a No 5 alarm fire.

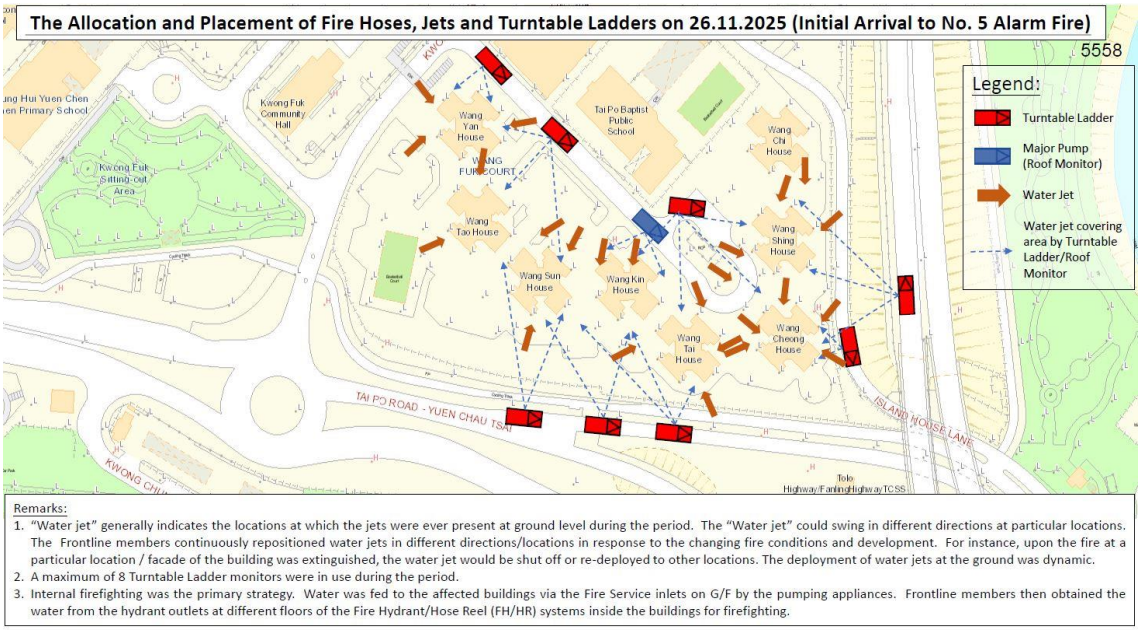


Figure 7-3: Map showing location and placement of fire hoses, water jets and Turntable Ladders during No 5 alarm fire

630. On 26 November 2025, a total of 112 appliance crews were deployed in operations involving the use of breathing apparatus. Of these, crews from 43 appliances were deployed to Wang Cheong House (Block F) and 33 to Wang Tai House (Block E). Nine appliance crews were deployed to each of Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Shing House (Block G). Six appliance crews were deployed to Wang Sun House (Block C), two to Wang Yan House (Block A) and one to Wang Chi House (Block H).

B7. 27 November 2025

631. The fire was progressively contained by the firefighters over the course of 27 November 2025.

632. Firefighting was first completed at Wang Tao House (Block B) at 16:00 hours on 27 November 2025. By then, firefighting efforts reached up to 19/F at Wang Shing House (Block G), 21/F at Wang Cheong House (Block F), 23/F at Wang Tai House (Block E), 16/F and 29/F at Wang Kin House (Block D), 17/F at Wang Sun House (Block C) and 18/F at Wang Yan House (Block A).

633. At 18:00 hours, relief fire crews were rotated in for all fire appliances in operation, involving a total of 16 Hydraulic Platforms, 17 Major Pumps and 18 Light Rescue Units. At the time, it was reported that firefighting at Wang Shing House (Block G) had been completed.

634. The fire was declared surrounded by DD(Ops) Chan at 21:31 hours, meaning that the fire was unlikely to spread to unaffected units. Firefighting efforts were declared completed at Wang Cheong House (Block F) at 23:00 hours. Firefighting efforts continued at Wang Tai House (Block E), Wang Kin House (Block D), Wang Sun House (Block C) and Wang Yan House (Block A).

B8. 28 November 2025

635. The fire was declared under control at 03:15 hours on 28 November 2025. Firefighting efforts at the remaining blocks were completed over the following hours: 04:00 hours at Wang Kin House (Block D), 05:00 hours at Wang Yan House (Block A), and 08:00 hours for each of Wang Tai House (Block E) and Wang Sun House (Block C).

636. At 10:18 hours, a "Stop" message was issued by DD(Ops) Chan. This denoted that there were sufficient resources on the scene and that no further mobilisations were necessary. At the time, 113 fire appliances and 30 ambulances with 635 FS members remained on site to complete damping down efforts and to attend to outstanding assistance requests.

B9. Involvement of the Police

637. The Police also participated in the emergency response. The FSD and the Police operate under an established understanding for fire incidents: upon the arrival of the Police at a fire scene, they assist in evacuating and directing residents to places of safety, while the FSD concentrates on firefighting and rescue. This arrangement was activated from the earliest stage of the WF Court fire.

638. The first Police officers arrived at the scene at 14:59 hours. At 15:15 hours, the Police set up a Forward Command Post at the scene. In line with the usual collaboration, the Police took initiative in evacuating residents in the surrounding area using the public announcement systems and loudhailers on vehicles.

639. Between 14:50 and 16:00 hours, a total of 145 Police officers responded to the incident and arrived at the scene. All available Police Tactical Unit ("PTU") platoons were directed to the scene and arrived by 17:30 hours. They assisted with cordon control, casualty clearing, site traffic management, communication with relatives of victims, casualty documentation and media reception.

640. Between 26 and 28 November 2025, a total of 3,694 Police officers were deployed to handle the incident.

641. Notably, between 16:13 and 16:40 hours on 26 November 2025, four teams of PTU officers were deployed to Wang Chi House (Block H) and Wang Yan House (Block A) to evacuate residents. They searched 27/F to 31/F of Wang Yan House and 22/F to 31/F of Wang Chi House, successfully evacuating nine residents from six flats. However, the operation was halted and the officers were ordered to withdraw at around 16:40 hours in view of safety concerns.

642. In terms of the command structure of the Police operation:

(i) Overall strategic command was initially assumed by the Duty Controller of the Regional Command and Control Centre New Territories. At 15:40 hours, the Higher Command ("HICOM") at the New Territories North Regional Police Headquarters, Tai Po was activated to take over strategic command. Following the declaration of a "Major Incident" by Assistant Commissioner of Police (Operations) at 17:36 hours, an Incident Command Centre comprising 11 officers was activated at HICOM.

(ii) At the scene, the Assistant Divisional Commander of Tai Po Division (at Senior Inspector of rank), assumed the role of Tactical Commander at 15:15 hours. The position was taken over by the Deputy Commander of Tai Po District (at Senior Superintendent of Police rank) at 15:44 hours, followed by a Chief Superintendent of Police ("CSP") at 18:00 hours.

643. The Security Bureau was informed of the fire at 15:24 hours. It subsequently activated the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre, which facilitated collaboration with other Government departments.

644. Other specialist units within the Police were also activated:

(i) The Casualty Enquiry Unit ("CEU") was mobilised at 17:36 hours and commenced operations at 18:32 hours to handle public enquiries relating to casualties. CSP Tsang Shuk Yin (witness no 41), officer-in-command of the CEU, gave oral testimony in the Evidential Hearing about the work of the CEU. The CEU had last been activated in 2018 in response to the Tai Po Road bus accident. From 26 November 2025 to 13 January 2026, the CEU handled a total of 489 missing person reports. These reports were catalogued and matched against Government databases and other sources of information. Of the 489 cases:

(a) 196 cases related to 166 persons who were confirmed dead;

(b) 40 cases related to 37 persons who were injured;

(c) 184 cases related to individuals who were confirmed safe;

(d) 37 related to persons who had passed away or left Hong Kong prior to the incident;

(e) 31 were classified as non-pursuable due to insufficient information; and

(f) one case involved a caller who did not intend to make a missing person's report.

(ii) A Casualty Documentation Team was also mobilised to hospitals to assist with hospital enquiries at 17:23 hours.

(iii) The DVIU was mobilised in the evening of 26 November 2025 to recover and identify the fatalities in the fire. A total of 605 officers were deployed by the DVIU. Superintendent Cheng Ka Chun (witness no 42), the officer-in-charge of the DVIU, testified in the Evidential Hearing about the work of the DVIU, the members of which had to work in the most difficult environment under extreme physical and emotional stress.

C. REVIEW OF THE FIREFIGHTING TACTICS AND DEPLOYMENT OF RESOURCES

C1. Firefighting tactics

(I) External and internal firefighting

645. Figures 7-1 to 7-3 show the positions of the water jets deployed at various times on the day of the fire. The water jets could swing in different directions at particular locations. The frontline FS members continuously repositioned water jets in different directions and locations in response to the changing fire conditions and development. For instance, upon extinguishing the fire at a particular location or façade of the building, the water jet would be shut off or re-deployed to other locations. The deployment of water jets at the ground was dynamic.

646. These external water jets were employed to create water curtains and sprinklers for forestalling fire spread rather than directly suppressing the fire. According to DCFO Sunny Wong of the FSD,

internal firefighting is the primary and most effective tactic for extinguishing fires in high-rise buildings. Due to the height, enclosure, and structural complexity of tall buildings, external water streams lack the accuracy, penetration, and cooling effect required to reach the fire floor effectively. Instead, suppression depends on firefighters advancing hoselines internally. This approach is critical for suppressing fires at their origin and rescuing trapped occupants. Internal firefighting enables firefighters to locate and extract trapped persons swiftly, a capability that external attacks cannot achieve, thereby fulfilling the core mission of life saving despite the inherent risks involved.

647. The FSD's operational guidelines provide that without instruction or permission of the officer-in-charge, no external water jet should be applied directly to units at the scene. The FSD explains that this protocol is critical due to the serious danger posed to life therein by introducing a large volume of water into a superheated and ventilation-limited space.

648. Application of water jets would have resulted in the rapid vaporisation of water, producing an immense quantity of steam. Given that water expands approximately 1,700 times in volume when converted to steam, the resulting pressurised hot gases would be forcibly expelled, driving extreme heat and steam into adjacent unaffected compartments and even building common areas, including escape routes. The consequences would be severe and immediate: a rapid, lethal rise in ambient temperature combined with a complete loss of visibility due to dense steam. This would critically endanger any individual awaiting rescue within the affected units or areas and also pose a grave risk to firefighters conducting interior firefighting and rescue operations.

(II) Tactics adopted by the FSD at the scene

649. The FSD has established guidelines about the aforesaid tactics and operations, and these were also the tactics adopted by the firemen in fighting the fire in WF Court.

650. The first Turntable Ladder arrived at the scene at 15:02 hours. At the height of the firefighting operations, a total of eight Turntable Ladders were engaged. The Turntable Ladders were deployed to conduct external firefighting with a view to containing the rapid spread of the fire along the façades of the buildings.

651. The FSD mainly relied on internal firefighting to suppress the fire. However, internal firefighting at the initial stage was delayed in light of obstructions to the entrances of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E).

652. The Committee had also heard allegations by residents that the firefighting response was hampered by insufficient water pressure at the initial stages of the fire, and that water jets could not reach even 1/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F).

653. When SStnO Hui was asked about this in his evidence, he testified that water supplies were adequate that day, and that there were no issues with water pressure as water was normally pumped through their fire appliances into their hoses which ensures adequate pressure. As mentioned above, the WSD had deployed staff to the scene to increase the water pressure to around 7 to 7.5 bar at around 16:00 hours.

654. The photographic and videographic evidence received by the Committee shows that frontline personnel were able to deploy hoses and water monitors (examples of which are shown below). There is no direct evidence that the water pressure was insufficient, or that this hampered the firefighting operations.



Figure 7-4



Figure 7-5



Figure 7-6

Figures 7-4 to 7-6: **Still images taken from footage taken by bystanders (at around 15:11, 15:16, 15:45 hours) and from CCTV footage of bicycle parking area of Wang Tai House (Block E) (15:17:42 hours)**

(III) Expert opinion of Professor Usmani

655. According to Professor Usmani, most building regulations are primarily focused on fires originating inside building compartments. External fires in Hong Kong buildings are not considered likely as regulations expressly prohibit the use of combustible materials on building exterior façades. The BD's Code of Practice for Fire Safety in Buildings 2011 requires non-combustible materials on external façades.

656. Firefighting strategies and training in Hong Kong are therefore focused on internal fires and these indeed form the vast majority of the fire emergencies in Hong Kong. The FSD has an exemplary track record of providing timely and effective response to such fires saving lives and protecting property, despite Hong Kong building fire loads being among the highest in the world (around 1,400 megajoules/m^2) as it is one of the most densely populated urban environments in the world.

657. Professor Usmani also pointed out that there are no effective firefighting strategies for façade fires in tall buildings globally.

658. It is quite clear that the FSD had no pre-considered plan or strategy to deal with building façades fire of such scale and dimension, for the simple reason that the FSD did not contemplate that a fire of such scale could happen.

659. According to Professor Usmani, the previous experiences of the fires at King's Cross Station in London on 18 November 1987 (resulting in 31 deaths), Garley Building in Hong Kong on 20 November 1996 (resulting in 41 deaths) and Grenfell Tower in London on 14 June 2017 (resulting in 72 deaths) may have provided hints that accelerated vertical spread of fire by reason of chimney effect can occur in places such as re-entrants in buildings' exterior.

660. Yet, according to Professor Usmani, the WF Court fire was certainly exceptional in terms of its magnitude. There were three particularly exceptional features:

(i) The speed of the accelerated vertical spread of fire was exceptional, with the highest velocity of the spread of fire at WF Court being up to almost 10 m per second (which

translates to about three storeys per second), as compared with a maximum rate of fire spread of 8 m per minute (which translates to about three storeys per minute) in the case of the Grenfell Tower fire.

(ii) A total of seven buildings caught fire in the case of WF Court.

(iii) The speed by which the fire spread from one building to another was also exceptional.

661. Having reviewed the circumstances on the day of the fire, Professor Usmani was of the view that, given the extreme context, there was in practical terms very limited additional action that the FSD could have taken on site to materially alter the outcome.

(IV) The observations of the Committee

662. Having reviewed the circumstances facing the fire crews on the day of the fire, the Committee does not find that there are any fundamental flaws in the firefighting tactics adopted by them in carrying out the firefighting operation.

663. The Committee shares the same observation of Professor Usmani. By reasons of: (i) the accelerated rapid vertical spread of the fire in the re-entrants of Wang Cheong House (Block F); (ii) the speed in which the fire in Wang Cheong House spread to Wang Tai House (Block E) at 14:58 hours and the repeated rapid vertical spread of the fire in the re-entrants of Wang Tai House; (iii) the speed in which the escape routes of Wang Cheong House and Wang Tai House were compromised; (iv) the rapid spread of the fire to the other buildings due to the dry and windy condition and flying embers resulting from the use of non-fire-retardant

scaffolding nets, the Committee doubts whether any predetermined firefighting tactics and strategy could have made a material difference in the disaster that happened on the day of the fire.

664. Yet, there are always sobering reflections to be drawn in particular from a fire of such magnitude. Compared with fires inside a building, façade fires carry a significantly higher risk of rapid and uncontrolled fire spread. That risk may justify an enhanced pre-determined deployment of aerial appliances for suspected façade fires, so that effective external firefighting can be undertaken at the earliest opportunity. The FSD should therefore develop specific protocols and new tactics for responding to façade fires, addressing the matters set out above.

665. Further, the operational tactics adopted by the FSD in the WF Court fire may provide some guidelines for the contingency plan in the future. For example, the Committee heard evidence of the adoption of a building-by-building command strategy to cater for the different circumstances of each block, which was unprecedented in the history of the FSD's operations. Whether such measures should be incorporated as a standard protocol in multi-building fires is a matter that the FSD may wish to take into account as part of its holistic review.

C2. Deployment of resources and escalation of fire alarm

(I) Escalation of the fire alarm

666. The FSD responded swiftly to the initial report of the fire. The first fire appliances arrived at the scene at 14:56:22 hours, five minutes and five seconds after the incident was reported to the FSCC at 14:51:17 hours. The initial turnout was also substantially larger than

normal, in accordance with the contingency plan in force for the Works at WF Court. The Committee agrees with the submissions of the Legal Team that this is a testament to the FSD's operational readiness and the utility of its contingency planning.

667. Upon their arrival at the scene, the FSD rightly escalated its response to the fire, upgrading the fire to a No 3 alarm six minutes after the arrival of the first fire appliances and No 4 alarm 32 minutes later.

(II) The observations made by the Legal Team

668. However, the Legal Team submitted that, with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been preferable had the escalation of fire alarm been made earlier, so that resources could have been deployed to the scene more promptly.

669. The FSD's Guidelines on Upgrading Fire Alarms states that a No 1 or No 2 alarm should be upgraded to a No 3 alarm "*if the fire cannot effectively be dealt with by the initial attendance*". Upon arriving at the scene, the Incident Commander is required to estimate whether the resources available to him are sufficient to deal with the incident effectively and in a timely manner. Saliently, "*unless the [Incident Commander] has fully appraised the size and location of the fire, and is confident that the fire can be contained within a short period of time to eliminate the risks to occupants, the fire should be upgraded immediately*". The Guidelines conclude with a golden rule where the Incident Commander is directed that "*if in doubt, the golden rule is: Raise the alarm*".

670. Based on the circumstances facing the firefighters at the critical times, Mr Dawes SC submitted that:

(i) As SStnO Hui reported to the FSCC at 14:57 hours, the fire had already reached eight metres in width and 30 metres in height by then, as shown in Figure 7-7 below. He had also noted that the rear entrance of Wang Cheong House (Block F) had been blocked by debris. By 14:59 hours, the fire had also rapidly spread up the entire re-entrant. As DD(Ops) Chan accepted, there were already sufficient grounds to upgrade the alarm to a No 3 alarm at that moment in time.

(ii) Likewise, the fire was only upgraded to a No 4 alarm after the fire had spread to a total of five blocks, after vertical fires had spread in six re-entrants, and after the entrances of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) had been completely blocked by debris. By that point, the FSD had already received 37 assistance requests. It had also received a Mayday call from Fireman Ho, which necessitated the diversion of resources from the FSD's other tasks. The situation justified upgrading the alarm at an earlier stage.



Figure 7-7: Still images from videos of Wang Cheong House (Block F) captured by Mr Yip Fai (14:56:58, 14:57:38 and 14:57:57 hours)

671. Mr Dawes SC has rightly observed that while the differences might have amounted only to minutes, these decisions directly affected how quickly fire appliances and personnel reached the scene in the critical early stages of the fire. Every second counted: an earlier deployment that contained the fire before it developed rapidly might have made a difference to the outcome.

672. Further, the Legal Team has pointed out the painful fact that the manpower levels at the initial stage of the fire resulted in the FSD having to make difficult trade-offs in its firefighting operations:

(i) DD(Ops) Chan acknowledged that at the early stages, the FSD focused their efforts on fighting the fire at Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) and were unable to spare manpower to evacuate the other blocks

floor by floor. The FSD's evidence is that this prioritisation of resources "*likely delayed the fire spread [to other blocks]*", but this may be questionable given that the fire primarily spread through flying embers and debris high in the air whereas the FSD's firefighting efforts in the initial stage were primarily focused on clearing entryways into Wang Cheong House and Wang Tai House on the ground. In any event, such decisions have unavoidably resulted in questions by some family members of victims in other blocks, such as by Madam Chong Sio Pek whose mother passed away in the fire, as to whether the rescue of their loved ones had been properly prioritised by the FSD.

(ii) Even later on during the fire, there were instances of manpower constraints. DCFO Wong King Man explained that SAR Teams were allocated to different blocks based on how seriously they were affected by the fire, resulting in some assistance requests for Wang Chi House (Block H) and Wang Kin House (Block D) taking over nine hours to be handled.

(III) The observations made by Counsel for the Government

673. On the other hand, as pointed out by Mr Jenkin Suen SC ("Mr Suen SC") for the Government, any "delay" in the upgrading of the fire alarm did not make any difference in the firefighting effort made by the FSD on the day of the fire.

674. According to him, escalation of the fire alarm has two effects: it would affect the deployment of resources and the command structure for fighting the fire.

675. In term of deployment of resources:

(i) By the time of the No 3 alarm at 15:02 hours, the initial deployment had already reached approximately 80% of the pre-determined attendance for a No 3 alarm fire.

(ii) By the time of the No 4 alarm at 15:34 hours, 269 FS members had already been dispatched, approximately twice the pre-determined attendance for a No 5 alarm. The practical resource gap that an earlier No 4 upgrade might have addressed was already being filled by other means, including the DCP's independent deployment of 10 additional SAR Teams between 15:20 and 15:48 hours.

(iii) By the time of the No 5 alarm at 18:22 hours, cumulative deployment was 6.5 times the No 5 alarm pre-determined attendance (718 FS members deployed against a pre-determined attendance of 110).

676. In term of the command structure, DD(Ops) Chan had already arrived at the scene at 16:10 hours (well before the No 5 alarm upgrade) and had immediately begun providing on-site strategic advice, instructions and support to the Incident Commander. By 16:35 hours, DD(Ops) Chan had instructed the implementation of the building-by-building command strategy with eight operation sectors, each under a designated Senior Officer for firefighting and a separate Senior Officer as SAR leader. The No 5 alarm upgrade at 18:22 hours therefore formalised a command structure that was already substantively in place and operational, rather than representing the first point at which strategic-level direction was being exercised.

677. On the day of the fire, the actual deployment ran well ahead of the alarm level at every stage. Further, the necessary command structure was properly in place to deal with the fire of such unprecedented scale. In fact, by 21:00 hours on 26 November 2025, 22 senior officers and directorate officers from both operational and non-operational units were present at the scene, far beyond the required pre-determined attendance for a No 5 alarm fire which normally required only a single-digit number of senior or directorate officers. Given the very dynamic situation at the scene and the unprecedented scale of the fire, the FSD should not be criticised for any "delay" in upgrading the fire alarms.

678. Further, in the opinion of Professor Usmani, even though there was a significant delay in upgrading the No 4 alarm to a No 5 alarm, the pre-determined attendance deployed at the No 4 alarm had already exceeded the No 5 alarm requirements. By reason of this, it is difficult to determine if this had any significant effect on worsening an already dire situation.

(IV) The observations and findings of the Committee

679. Having heard the submissions of the parties and the view of Professor Usmani and having reviewed the circumstances on the day of the fire, the Committee has the following observations to make in relation to the escalation of fire alarm and the deployment of resources:

(i) Due to the extreme and most difficult conditions facing the Incident Commanders at the scene, the Committee does not make any criticism against the real-time and tactical decisions made by them at the scene.

(ii) The FSD had been treating the fire as a very serious incident from the outset. The fact that the deployments exceeded the pre-determined attendance of each fire alarm level on the day of the fire speaks volumes about the FSD's utmost importance attached to the firefighting operation.

680. Yet, with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been more desirable for the fire alarm to have been upgraded earlier, in particular in the initial stage of the fire. As the Committee sees it, earlier deployment of more Turntable Ladders at the initial stage might have helped to suppress the fire in the external walls of Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E), which might have reduced the developments of more re-entrant fires in other buildings. Further, if there had been more firefighters available at the critical time between 15:00 hours to 16:00 hours, there would have been a greater capacity to handle the requests for assistance from the residents of the then unaffected buildings, whilst carrying out the firefighting operation in Wang Cheong House and Wang Tai House at the same time.

681. Despite such observation, one has to appreciate that, even if the fire alarm had been escalated earlier, the result would only have been different if the additional resources were deployed at the right places at the right time. This would have been very difficult for the Incident Commanders given the unprecedented scale of the fire in this case. It is always easy to analyse the development of the fire with the benefit of hindsight, but the Incident Commanders did not have that luxury when they made the challenging tactical decisions under extreme pressure at the fire scene.

682. After the fire in WF Court, it is incumbent on the FSD to review its guidelines and enhance its training for officers who may take on the role of Incident Commander, to ensure that fires of a similar nature are upgraded at the first possible opportunity. It is noted that the Government has in its Counsel's closing submissions committed to conducting such a review.

683. In recognition of the extreme fire risks posed by large-scale BMR works, the FSD should also critically review the sufficiency of the pre-determined attendances for such fires. In this regard, other high-risk fires such as hotel fires, hospital fires, fires in places with limited water supply and dangerous goods fires are pre-determined as No 2 alarm fires:

(i) Presently, the FSD classifies fires in buildings undergoing renovations as No 1 alarm fire but provides for the deployment of additional fire appliances by way of contingency plans. It is the evidence of DD(Ops) Chan that their present approach provides the FSD with greater flexibility.

(ii) Given the severe risks of fire in buildings undergoing large-scale BMR works, the classification of façade fires in these situations to a No 2 alarm or above would provide a minimum standard response to such fires and would avoid inconsistent decision-making by officers who are tasked with formulating contingency plans. The Committee therefore welcomes the Government's support of a specific review of its alarm level system in relation to buildings undergoing large-scale BMR works. Further, the FSD may consider whether a contingency plan approach, which is more flexible than a fixed alarm classification, should be adopted for fires in large-scale BMR sites.

(iii) The contingency plan for WF Court provided for the deployment of an additional Major Pump and Light Rescue Unit in the event of fire, without differentiation between internal and façade fires, the time of day and the number of buildings affected, all of which could have affected the scale of the firefighting operations required. The FSD may wish to consider whether its guidelines on the formulation of contingency plans should be reviewed in this regard.

684. In addition to examining the timing by which the fire alarm was upgraded, the Committee also heard evidence on whether the fire should have been upgraded beyond a No 5 alarm to a Disaster Alarm. The evidence suggests that such a step was not warranted:

(i) Under the FSD General Orders, a Disaster Alarm denotes a "*wide-spread incident, or series of simultaneous incidents likely to engage the entire resources of the Service for a protracted period, and possibly requiring the assistance of the garrison stationed in Hong Kong*".

(ii) The firefighting operations that day had not engaged the then entire resources of the FSD, nor was it practical to do so either given physical site constraints.

(iii) The evidence shows that the FSD did deploy resources beyond a No 5 alarm as and when required. At the height of the FSD's operations, staffing levels exceeded the pre-determined attendance of a No 5 alarm by approximately nine times.

685. The Committee agrees with the decision made by the FSD not to upgrade the fire to a Disaster Alarm.

C3. Possible use of other resources for firefighting operation

686. After the inferno at WF Court, there were some voices that the FSD could have deployed additional resources to tackle the fire. In this sub-section, the Committee will address these concerns and the explanations given by the FSD for not deploying these resources. Having heard the evidence, the Committee agrees that the use of these suggested resources was not appropriate on the day of fire.

(I) Possible use of aerial ladders capable of reaching a higher height

687. As mentioned in the earlier part of this Chapter, internal firefighting, according to the FSD, is the primary and most effective tactic for extinguishing fires in high-rise buildings.

688. The highest-reaching aerial appliances currently operated by the FSD are 56-metre Turntable Ladders which can reach a height of about 17 storeys. However, the operational height of an aerial ladder is not the sole factor in determining its effectiveness, as safe deployment requires the use of outriggers on both sides of the appliance, and the ground footprint required for operation increases proportionally with the ladder height.

689. In Hong Kong, the design and construction of EVAs are stipulated in the BD's Code of Practice for Fire Safety in Buildings 2011. The width of an EVA should be not less than six metres and must allow safe and unobstructed access as well as safe operation of a fire appliance having a turning circle of 26 metres and a length of 12 metres. According to DCFO Sunny Wong, the FS in Shenzhen has a 100-metre aerial ladder platform. But, even if the FSD were equipped with such an appliance, it would require a design access width of approximately 10 metres (equivalent

to the width of a four-lane road) for aerial operation, rendering such an appliance unable to operate on EVAs throughout the territory in Hong Kong.

690. In addition to the above-mentioned requirement, EVA must also allow safe operation of a fire appliance having a gross weight of 30 tonnes. A 100-metre aerial ladder platform typically weighs more than 60 tonnes which substantially exceeds 30 tonnes. Even though there is a suggestion to remove pedestrian railings to create additional operating space, it fails to account for the technical constraints of actual operations. The load-bearing capacity of road surfaces would remain inadequate, as pedestrian roads are generally designed to have a lower load-bearing capacity. Under these conditions, the safe deployment and operation of such appliance could not be assured.

691. Notwithstanding the aforesaid safety considerations, the sole viable location within the operational vicinity of WF Court for deploying a 100-metre aerial ladder platform would be at selected location at Tai Po Road (Yuen Chau Tsai), which is approximately 46 metres away from Wang Sun House (Block C). At this standoff distance, the rescue cage of the platform would be incapable of reaching the building façade to effect an aerial rescue. Furthermore, aerial water jets operating from this range would face significant operational constraints: wind deflection would reduce both targeting accuracy and effective reach, while the deployment location would restrict water coverage to a single building façade. Therefore, deploying a 100-metre aerial ladder platform would have offered no operational advantage over the Turntable Ladders already at the scene.

692. Expanding the EVA width may not be easy in the crowded city of Hong Kong. Experience from the Mainland indicates that the deployment of such appliances is only possible in newly developed areas, where road and access infrastructure can be designed from scratch to support

the larger ground footprint and higher loading demand of these specialised vehicles.

693. The Committee agrees with the explanation given by the FSD. Nevertheless, the FSD should keep the number and specifications of its Turntable Ladders and standards surrounding EVA (in particular in newly developed areas) under continuous review to ensure that its capabilities keep pace with technological and societal developments and are sufficient to tackle complex high-rise fires in such a dense urban environment as Hong Kong.

(II) Possible use of firefighting drones in fighting the fire

694. There have been some suggestions that the FSD should have used firefighting drones in extinguishing the fire. In particular, there were video clips on social media platforms showing the use of such devices in the Mainland in fighting or controlling fire in high-rise buildings.

695. However, according to DCFO Sunny Wong, drone-based firefighting technology currently being explored by Mainland fire departments remains at an experimental stage and has not yet reached a level of technical maturity suitable for application in real incidents.

696. He further explained that, according to information from the National Fire and Rescue Administration[81], no firefighting drones are currently in operational use by Mainland fire departments, and the use of drones for firefighting is still at the research and development stage. The application of drones in firefighting, particularly in high-rise buildings,

81 The supreme national authority for fire and rescue services on the Mainland, operating under the Ministry of Emergency Management and responsible for setting national policies and standards and directing the country's comprehensive fire and rescue forces.

remains a novel and developing concept. Based on available information, there are currently no known fire departments that have utilised drones for direct fire suppression in actual fire incidents. The feasibility of this approach is still subject to experimentation and assessment.

697. At present, operations of such systems at actual fire scenes are subject to significant operational limitations. Firefighting drones are inherently constrained by their carrying capacity. In addition to the weight of the drone itself, any firefighting operation would require the drone to carry water or be connected to a water source through a delivery hose, which substantially increases the load and adversely affects the flight stability. Moreover, the diameter of water delivery hoses used by drones is significantly smaller than that of conventional fire hoses, resulting in limited water flow and pressure. These limit their effectiveness in suppressing large-scale or high-intensity fires.

698. According to the minutes of a meeting between the FSD and Dajiang Innovations ("DJI"), a leading drone manufacturer, DJI's flagship industrial model at the time, the FC 100, has a maximum lifting capacity of approximately 85 kg and has only been tested by the China Fire and Rescue Corps with 40 mm hoses.

699. Other limitations include operational and environment constraints. First, drones built to carry larger loads would in turn create dangerous downdrafts which may exacerbate the spread of fire. Second, in high-temperature environments, intense heat can degrade battery performance and damage sensitive electronic components, significantly reducing operational endurance. Smoke-filled conditions would further compound these difficulties, as particulate matter reduce visibility and impair drone sensors, compromising navigation accuracy and obstacle detection. These factors increase the risk of malfunction or collision, raising serious safety concerns for both firefighters and the public.

700. The evidence shows that the FSD has been studying the use of firefighting drones for quite some time. The FSD commenced drone trials as early as 2017. In 2019, a delegation visited the Fire and Rescue Institute on the Mainland to study the latest developments in drone deployment, including applications in firefighting and rescue scenarios. Since then, the FSD has continued to research and monitor advancements in drone technology through various channels. In fact, the FSD began extensive operational use of drones in rescue operations from 2022. The FSD has also attended: (i) regular exchanges and visits with its counterparts on the Mainland; (ii) meetings with drone manufacturers to examine proposals for rescue and firefighting applications; and (iii) large-scale drone and rescue exhibitions.

701. Though there may be a few video clips on the internet showing the use of firefighting drones, there is no evidence to suggest that such use has gone beyond the experimental stage. Further, there are indeed technical limitations about the use of firefighting drones at least according to the existing state of technology. Under such circumstances, the FSD should not be criticised for not deploying such experimental firefighting technology at WF Court.

702. Instead of direct firefighting, the FSD did in fact utilise drones for aerial surveillance purposes in the WF Court fire. The FSD's UAST deployed 10 drones equipped with live-streaming and thermal imaging capabilities to analyse the fire situation and provide supplementary high-altitude illumination during nighttime operations. According to the FSD, these assets played a crucial role in this large-scale incident. For instance, drones were used to observe the condition of two persons trapped on a building rooftop during the fire at WF Court. When conditions permitted, firefighting personnel traversed the scene to reach the rooftop and successfully rescued both individuals. During the later stages, the UAST also utilised drones to monitor reignitions caused by extremely high residual

temperatures, enabling the immediate deployment of resources to address any flare-ups.



Figure 7-8: Still image taken from drone footage of Wang Tai House (Block E) at around 00:25 hours on 27 November 2025

703. To further augment aerial surveillance capacity, the FSD borrowed 10 additional drones equipped with optical cameras and thermal imaging devices from the Fire and Rescue Corps of Guangdong Province during the fire. These supplementary items of equipment, according to the FSD, enhanced situational awareness throughout the operation.

704. The evidence shows that the FSD has continuously engaged with international counterparts and relevant industry partners to monitor technological developments in firefighting and rescue operations. In parallel, ongoing research is being undertaken to evaluate the feasibility and operational applicability of ultrahigh aerial rescue vehicles, drone-based firefighting systems, robotic firefighting systems, and other innovative

solutions in the Hong Kong context. The Committee welcomes such initiatives on the part of the FSD.

(III) Possible use of helicopters and water bombs to fight the fire

705. There is also a suggestion that the FSD should have used helicopters to fight the fire in WF Court.

706. The FSD explained that the deployment of helicopters to spray water or drop water bombs would not have been a safe or effective means of enhancing firefighting operations in this incident.

707. First, fires in residential buildings normally occur within enclosed, three-dimensional structures. Even if water were released from a helicopter above the building, the airdropped water would not be able to penetrate into the interior of the building where the fire is located. Instead, it would largely fall on exterior façades or rooftops, and would therefore have little or no direct effect on controlling fires within the residential units.

708. Second, helicopter downwash could create adverse and hazardous conditions. The downwash generated by a helicopter could force smoke into buildings, thereby increasing the risk to occupants who are trapped inside. It may also have driven additional air into the structure, potentially intensifying the fire and increasing the risk of fire spread or reignition. In addition, turbulence generated by the aircraft may also have dislodged nearby debris, posing further hazards to firefighters and members of the public at ground level.

709. Third, the release of water by helicopter also presented significant safety risks. A water bomb dropped by a helicopter may weigh up to one tonne. When released from height, such a volume of water can damage temporary structures such as bamboo scaffolding and wash debris to the ground level, creating additional hazards.

710. Further, the FSD adduced a memorandum from the Government Flying Service dated 24 December 2025 explaining that, given the dense smoke in the area, helicopters could not approach the buildings to aim their water bombs accurately towards the fire (water bombs are typically released at a height of approximately 50 to 70 metres above their target).

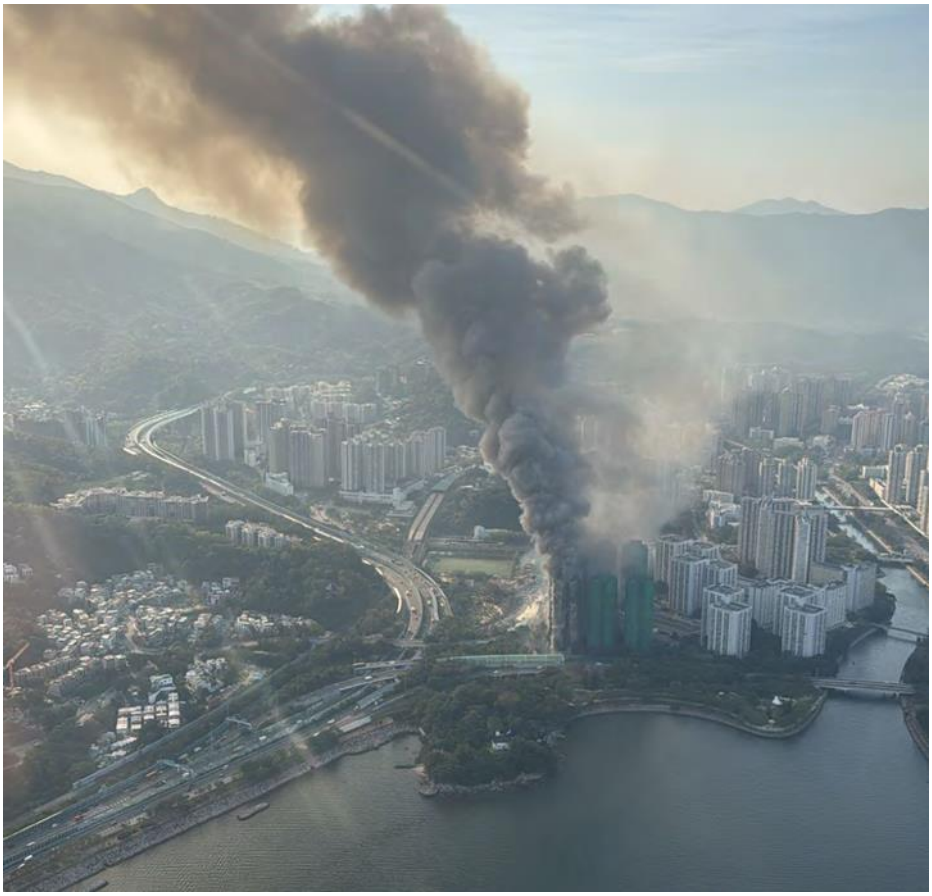


Figure 7-9: Aerial photo of WF Court fire supplied by the Government Flying Service

711. In fact, this subject had been investigated by the Commission of Inquiry on the fire in Garley Building in 1996.[82] Noting also the experience of the aerial rescue operation in respect of the First Interstate Bank Building fire in Los Angeles of USA in 1988, the Commission found that the use of helicopters to conduct aerial rescue operations in high-rise buildings had produced a number of adverse effects including downwash stirring up of smoke, loose objects falling to the ground, and noise disturbances to the local fire station's ground operations. Though a helicopter had helped to rescue a few persons on the rooftop of Garley Building during the fire, the Commission concluded that the use of helicopter in built-up areas should be restricted to last-resort situations and when there are persons exposed to imminent danger or in need of immediate medical attention.

712. Considering that the fire was quite uncontrollable and was spreading across different buildings rapidly, bamboo poles and other debris were falling from height and the wind was strong on the day of the fire, the Committee agrees with the assessment made by the FSD that it would have been inappropriate and too risky to use helicopters either for firefighting or rescue operation on that day.

(IV) Cross-border assistance

713. At around 22:00 hours on 26 November 2025, the Guangdong Provincial Fire and Rescue Corps mobilised approximately 20 fire appliances and 100 personnel to stand by at Liantang Port in case further manpower support was required. After the FSD was notified of the deployment, DD(Ops) Chan, as the Incident Commander at the time, decided that additional manpower was not required. The FSD instead

82 Chapter 13 of the Interim Report of the Inquiry into the Garley Building Fire on 20 November 1996 by Mr Justice K H Woo on 16 June 1997.

borrowed from the Mainland authorities 10 drones equipped with optical cameras and thermal imaging devices, and 20 sets of exoskeleton equipment, for use in its firefighting efforts.

714. There are queries raised as to why the FSD had not sought additional manpower from its Mainland counterpart in fighting the fire at WF Court.

715. The FSD explained that, at the time, approximately 980 personnel had been dispatched to the scene, out of around 1,700 personnel on duty in Hong Kong at any given time. In other words, the FSD itself still had sufficient manpower to deploy to the scene had it been necessary.

716. According to DCFO Sunny Wong, owing to physical constraints within the building, including limited staircase and corridor space, as well as extreme heat conditions requiring floor-by-floor advancement, there was a practical limit to the number of personnel that could be effectively and safely deployed at any one time. Additional manpower from neighbouring cities would not have materially accelerated firefighting or rescue operations.

717. The FSD also pointed to significant differences between Hong Kong and Mainland equipment standards, operational procedures and fire protection systems. Without significant prior collaborative training or drills, these would have increased risks for all firefighters involved had a joint operation been conducted, and could be counter-productive. As things stood at the time the fire at WF Court happened, DCFO Sunny Wong explained:

(i) Hong Kong and Mainland firefighters use different terminology and communication protocols, including different distress signals and emergency evacuation signals. In an emergency, there was a risk that firefighters might not recognise distress or emergency signals sent by their counterparts, which could have dire consequences.

(ii) Hong Kong and Mainland firefighters use different brands of breathing apparatus, which do not have cross-compatible emergency air supply mechanisms. In the case of an emergency to a particular firefighter, other firefighters would not have been able to perform basic emergency air-sharing procedures, compromising the safety of firefighters.

(iii) FSIs and street hydrants in Hong Kong and the Mainland are installed to different standards: local water supply outlets use instantaneous couplings conforming to British Standards, while Mainland outlets use Storz couplings under Guobiao standards. Mainland personnel and fire appliances would therefore not have been able to obtain water from Hong Kong's hydrant systems without specialised adapters.

(iv) Mainland firefighters have not been trained in the operation of the portable pumps used by firefighters in Hong Kong (which were used in upper floors at WF Court due to the FHHRSs being inoperative). Operational errors arising from unfamiliar controls and different pressure settings would have been dangerous, potentially leading to pump failure and loss of water supply.

718. Hence, although Mainland firefighters are professionally trained, deploying personnel unfamiliar with local operational protocols,

building configurations, and communication systems into a complex and hazardous setting would expose them to significantly increased safety risks. The decision was therefore made based on a professional safety assessment.

719. Nevertheless, the FSD had adopted a pragmatic and effective approach to cross-border collaboration by accepting specialised equipment support from the Mainland. Apart from the borrowing of 10 drones as mentioned above, the FSD also borrowed 20 sets of exoskeleton equipment provided by its Mainland counterpart. The exoskeleton equipment significantly reduced physical strain on personnel during transportation and movement, thereby providing valuable support during prolonged on-site operations.

720. Queries have also been raised as to why the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Emergency Management Co-operation and Greater Bay Area Emergency Response Operation Co-operation Framework Agreement ("Greater Bay Co-operation Agreement") was not activated in this incident. As explained by the FSD, while the Greater Bay Co-operation Agreement itself establishes a broad cooperation mechanism for contingencies, the initial phase of practical implementation has focused on natural disaster scenarios, such as earthquakes and floods. Following the signing of the Greater Bay Co-operation Agreement, two cross-boundary exercises were conducted in 2024 and 2025 covering natural disaster scenarios. In view of the complexity and differences in life-critical procedures among regions in handling large-scale building fires, this aspect, according to the FSD, will be further explored in the next stage with a phase-by-phase approach. Notwithstanding this, the FSD will explore with its counterparts in Guangdong and Macao the feasibility of expediting the operation of mutual assistance arrangements for large-scale building fires. The Committee accepts such explanation by the FSD and welcomes its initiative to continue exploring the prospect of further cooperation among the fire and rescue authorities of the Greater Bay Area.

D. REVIEW OF THE EVACUATION OPERATION AND PROCEDURES

D1. Evacuation of the residents on the day of the fire

721. The power supply of the FASs of the eight blocks at WF Court was turned off before the fire, and so that the evacuation of residents was hampered by their delayed awareness of the fire. The problem was further complicated by the fact that the windows of a large number of residential units were still covered by foam boards, which blocked the views of the occupants about what was happening outside the external walls of the buildings at WF Court.

722. Frontline personnel from the FSD noticed the absence of fire alarms and took steps to activate them. SStnO Hui testified that he instructed crew members to enter Wang Cheong House (Block F) to activate the fire alarms, but owing to the burning debris outside the front entrance, they were unable to enter the block. There is evidence that fire crews might have attempted to activate the fire alarms in Wang Tao House (Block B), Wang Sun House (Block C) and Wang Kin House (Block D) at around 15:35 or 15:40 hours but to no avail. Finally, members of the Fire Protection Facilities Supervision Division also arrived at the scene at 15:54 hours and attempted to activate the fire alarms at Wang Yan House (Block A), Wang Tao House and Wang Chi House (Block H), but again to no avail. These notwithstanding, based on evidence from Mr Lam Man Yan and some residents, the fire alarms at Wang Sun House should have already been activated by Mr Lam by 15:35 hours. Mr Lam should have also managed to activate the alarm of Wang Yan House.[83]

83 See Section E of Chapter 5.

723. With the fire alarms in six of the eight blocks being inoperative, most residents learnt of the fire from neighbours, family members or friends, from the smell of smoke, or from the sound of burning and the sirens of emergency vehicles. This is illustrated by the following summary compiled by the IFITF from the witness statements and questionnaires gathered from the residents:

Means of Discovery	**Resident Witness Statements**		**Resident Questionnaires**	
Witnessed fire or smoke	43	14.8%	48	8.3%
Smelled smoke	48	16.5%	110	19.0%
Heard sound of burning	10	3.4%	12	2.1%
Heard sirens / saw fire appliances	32	11.0%	30	5.2%
Heard fire alarm	1	0.3%	39	6.7%
Informed by others	157	54.0%	340	58.7%
Total	**291**	**100%**	**579**	**100%**

Table 7-1: Responses from the residents as to how they learnt about the fire

724. There is evidence that the property management staff of ISS also used loudhailers to alert residents to the fire in the open area near Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Tao House (Block B). This did not appear to have successfully alerted residents to the fire. Of all the residents who had submitted questionnaires to the Police, only one suggested he or she had been alerted to the fire by loudhailers.

725. Given the above, there are legitimate questions as to whether the FSD could and should have taken more steps to evacuate residents from all the blocks of WF Court once it became obvious that the fire was spreading from one block to the next. Even if, as the Counsel for the Government submits in its closing submissions, the possibility of fire spreading by flying embers was "*not predictable from the initial stage*", it was certainly predictable by the time the fire spread to Wang Tai House (Block E) at 15:00 hours.

726. Had residents of Wang Tao House (Block B) and Wang Shing House (Block G) been alerted to the fire promptly, there should have been sufficient time for them to evacuate. Those blocks only suffered rapid vertical fire spread over an hour after the firefighters arrived at the scene. Early warnings might have averted the three fatalities in those blocks. Likewise for Wang Sun House (Block C), had the fire alarms been activated even earlier than they were by Mr Lam Man Yan (sometime between 15:23 and 15:35 hours), that might have enabled Madam Ieong Vun Ieng and Mr Hung King Leong to become aware of the fire at a time when they were still able to evacuate from the building.

727. As mentioned above, DD(Ops) Chan's evidence is that the FSD focused its available resources on tackling the blaze at Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) to prevent fire spread and was unable to spare manpower for the evacuation of residents from other blocks. While the PTU did conduct an evacuation operation, it was limited to several floors on Wang Yan House (Block A) and Wang Chi House (Block H) and only began at 16:13 hours, by which time most other blocks had already been engulfed in smoke.

728. According to the analysis of the Legal Team, the aforesaid evidence highlights that the operations could have been more effective had the FSD escalated its response and deployment even more quickly on

the day. There is also a need for the FSD and the Police to devise clearer and more comprehensive protocols for evacuating occupants from building fires at the initial stage of response in the future, instead of only initiating such operations on an *ad hoc* basis after the fire has taken hold. The FSD may also need to consider clearer protocols for escalating its response should it discover faulty FASs or other FSIs at the fire scene. The Committee agrees with these observations.

D2. Alternative ways to warn the residents

729. Given these circumstances, questions may be raised as to whether the FSD and the Police had adopted any alternative measures to warn the residents about the fire.

730. According to the Police, the officers of Patrol sub-unit (Tai Po Division) did use the public announcement system on the police vehicles to instruct the residents to evacuate. Moreover, the officers of the Police Community Relations Office of Tai Po District accompanied Tai Po District Council member Mr Mui Siu Fung at the rooftop of WF Court car park to urge the residents to evacuate by using a loudhailer.

731. The evidence reveals that there are no established procedures of how to warn the occupants about any fire if the FAS of the subject building is not functional. The Committee will examine two other possible measures that the rescuing authorities could have taken to warn the residents.

(I) Sirens

732. One of the ways was the use of sirens on the fire appliances (or even Police vehicles). However, as SStnO Hui and DO Lam confirmed,

prevailing FSD policy required fire appliances to switch off their sirens upon arrival to minimise the noise disturbance to the firefighting operation.[84]

733. While this practice makes good sense generally, the sirens could have alerted residents to the fire in circumstances where the fire alarms were deactivated. Various residents described the scene of the fire as eerily quiet. Little could be heard but the crackle of burning bamboo. Consequently, residents in their flats might not have realised anything was wrong until it was too late. The FSD may wish to consider revising its policy so that, where a building's FAS is inoperative, fire appliances should keep their sirens on to maximise the chance of alerting the occupants inside the building.

(II) Emergency Alert System

734. There are some suggestions that the Government should have used the Emergency Alert System ("EAS") to disseminate emergency messages to the mobile phones of the residents through local mobile network operators, alerting them about the fire and giving them appropriate advice including immediate evacuation if necessary. The EAS was used once during the COVID-19 pandemic but has not been used since. The EAS was not used to alert WF Court residents to the fire on the day.

735. According to the policy or practice at the time of the fire (namely, General Circular 5/2020), the use of EAS would only be applicable to territory-wide emergency matters, such as massive breakdown of infrastructure, large-scale public riots, bomb disposals, etc., instead of localised incidents. As the EAS could only disseminate messages to general public at large, it was considered inappropriate to use the EAS to

84 The contingency plan in place for WF Court provided that "when travelling in the vicinity of the incident, fire appliances should switch on the flash lights only. Siren should only be used if the situation is needed.".

disseminate messages to specific individuals or groups of persons for a particular localised event, as it was the case for the fire in WF Court.

736. Further, according to DD(Ops) Chan, without educating the public about what they should have done following the receipt of an EAS message relating to building fire, it would be dangerous to use the EAS to send messages to the residents alerting them about the fire. An unfamiliar emergency alert might prompt trapped residents to react in unpredictable ways which might endanger their personal safety.

737. According to the experts in the Inquiry, detection time is an important component of the RSET. If an occupant in a building is not alerted to the fire, it would substantially increase the detection time thereby jeopardising his or her chance of survival. Though a fire of such scale or magnitude may have been beyond the contemplation of the relevant authorities and they may perhaps expect that the FASs would operate in normal circumstances, they should have planned for more scenarios where the use of the EAS may be effective. After all, the EAS was introduced to provide an important means to inform the public of different kind of emergencies. Timely dissemination of alert messages would be critical in the case of emergencies. If the occupants at WF Court had been given proper alerts in time, it would certainly have shortened the detection time for RSET thereby improving their chance of survival.

738. It is regrettable that the relevant guidelines at the time prevented the EAS from being used in the WF Court fire. DD(Ops) Chan accepted that, with the fire alarms disabled and the windows covered, the EAS was in practical terms the remaining means of alerting residents to the fire. Furthermore, given its severity and the number of people affected (including residents at work, and friends and family anywhere in the territory), the fire was very arguably not merely a localised incident.

739. After the fire, the Government has upgraded the EAS to allow messages to be sent to a particular locality, and is preparing preset messages for fires and other specific emergencies. But beyond this, there is a need to ensure that messages can be sent as promptly as possible. It is unacceptable that a system designed for emergencies cannot deliver urgent messages to those affected.

740. Apart from these possible measures, the FSD and the Police should continue to explore whether they can make use of new technology, such as drone-mounted loudhailers, to give warning to residents in case of fire in the future.

E. HANDLING OF EMERGENCY CALLS AND ASSISTANCE REQUESTS

741. The Committee has also reviewed the way in which the emergency 999 calls and other requests for assistance were handled on the day of the fire to see whether all the requests for assistance had been dealt with appropriately.

E1. Procedure of handling 999 emergency calls

742. The 999 hotline is managed by the Police Control and Command Centre ("PCCC"), where operators triage incoming calls based on the nature of the incident, whether it involves fire, crime, request for ambulance assistance or other emergencies.

743. There are three 999 call centres in Hong Kong operating round-the-clock, with each of them under one of the three Regional Command and Control Centres ("RCCC"): one for Hong Kong Island, one for Kowloon and one for the New Territories.

744. Each shift of a RCCC is commanded by one Duty Controller at Superintendent rank, whilst his or her team comprises one or two Duty Supervisors at Inspector or Senior Inspector rank, eight to 14 Divisional Consoles at Sergeant rank, two or three Senior Police Communications Officers ("SPCOs") and 14 to 25 Police Communications Officers ("PCOs"). The 999 calls operators ("999 Operators") who handle 999 calls, namely the SPCOs and PCOs, are civilian ranks, and have undergone requisite training to effectively perform the essential duties of handling 999 calls.

745. A call centre that operates under a RCCC possesses a maximum concurrent processing capacity of 69 calls, encompassing calls in active engagement with a 999 Operator and those held within an automated queue. The number of calls that can be answered concomitantly depends on the number of 999 Operators available at the RCCC call centre.

746. In the rare event that a RCCC call centre reaches its maximum capacity of 69 calls, the 70th call will be forwarded to another RCCC call centre with available capacity. Consequently, the total territory wide simultaneous handling capacity of 999 calls is 207 calls (i.e. 69 calls per RCCC call centre x three RCCCs). Calls beyond this limit cannot be connected and will be regarded as a "Loss Call".

747. When a call is confirmed to relate to fire or rescue matters, it is immediately transferred to the FSCC for the dispatch of FS resources. The 999 Operator will immediately inform the caller that the call will be conferenced with the FSCC under the FSD.

748. Under standard manning arrangements, the FSCC is equipped with 30 telephone lines and staffed with 37 personnel during daytime hours (09:00 hours to 18:00 hours) and 31 personnel during nighttime hours (18:00 hours to 09:00 hours).

E2. Handling of the emergency calls on the day of the fire

749. The call centre of RCCC New Territories ("RCCC NT") first received a report of the fire from a passerby at about 14:50 hours on 26 November 2025.

750. The Police received more than 520 calls concerning the incident to the 999 emergency line over the course of the fire. Of these, 406 were received between 14:00 and 23:59 hours on 26 November 2025. These represented approximately 9.7% of all 999 calls handled by the Police in this period territory-wide.

751. Most 999 calls in this period were between 15:00 and 15:59 hours, when a total of 111 calls relating to the fire were placed. In this period, the waiting time for a 999 Operator to pick up a 999 call increased from an average of seven seconds between 14:00 and 14:59 hours to an average of 38 seconds between 15:00 and 15:59 hours. At 15:08 hours, five additional 999 Operators were deployed as reinforcement at RCCC NT, bringing the total number of 999 Operators on duty at RCCC NT to 17. The waiting time decreased to an average of 23 seconds between 16:00 and 16:59 hours and then to an average of seven seconds between 17:00 to 17:59 hours. During this period, RCCC NT did not reach its maximum handling capacity of 69 calls at any one time.

752. After reviewing all the 999 emergency call records, the Legal Team noted the following deficiencies about the handling of the emergency calls on the day of fire:

(i) Since the FSCC had only 30 lines, there was a bottleneck in handling of the calls transferred to it from the PCCC. As a result, a substantial number of 999 calls relating to the fire

had to be placed on hold for several minutes before connecting to the FSCC. The longest waiting time identified, involving an assistance request for an individual in Flat 2807 of Wang Tai House (Block E), lasted 15 minutes and 40 seconds. On some occasions, calls were disconnected before they were connected to the FSCC. In those cases, the 999 Operators usually stayed on the line to relay information they obtained from the caller whilst waiting for the connection to the FSCC. In other cases, they relayed the information to the FSD by fax or by email. After the activation of the DCP at 15:20 hours, the FSD established a Support Centre manned with 18 lines to handle call-backs to persons awaiting assistance. This helped relieve the FSCC's workload and the FSCC was "*able to answer calls within an average of one minute for the rest of the day*".

(ii) For some of the calls, the callers had to repeat the information about the fire twice: one before the 999 Operator and another time before the call operator at the FSCC.

(iii) There were instances where the call handling procedures were not fully followed by the frontline 999 Operators:

(a) There was one call made at 15:04 hours by an elderly lady on 17/F in Wang Cheong House (Block F). She had just woken up from her sleep and found that a lot of smoke had entered her flat from the gaps in the doorframe of her flat. She then stayed in the toilet of her flat. The 999 Operator asked her whether she required assistance from the FS. After learning that the fire started on 1/F, the elderly lady

seemed to have the impression that the fire was still quite far away from her flat and hesitated as to whether she would require assistance. She was told to call later if she required assistance. The call was eventually ended without being transferred to the FSCC for handling. That elderly lady eventually died in the fire.

(b) Another 999 call was made by a teacher on 21:22 hours. The caller reported that the grandfather of a student of his, who was living in Flat 2802 of Wang Shing House (Block G), could not be contacted. Again the 999 Operator did not transfer the call to the FSCC. According to the FSD's record, they learnt about the occupant in Flat 2802 of Wang Shing House from information obtained at the scene at 22:11 hours. Eventually, firefighters attended the said unit at about 09:00 hours on 27 November 2025 and found the dead body of an elderly man inside the unit.

753. According to DCFO Sunny Wong, the non-transference of the calls should not have happened. The Police's procedures for handling 999 calls stated that all calls reporting a fire or requesting provision of either an ambulance or fire appliance should be "immediately" connected to the FSCC and that the 999 Operator should not seek to establish the location of the incident or the identity of the caller. The relevant 999 Operators should therefore have transferred the calls made by the elderly lady and the teacher to the FSCC for handling. The Committee does not know whether the transfer of such calls would have resulted in the successful rescue of the elderly lady and the elderly man, but it would certainly have increased their chance of survival.

754. Information collected from the callers requiring FS assistance was disseminated to the frontline personnel through three channels: radio (for immediate operational information); the FSD Messenger (screenshot of the Computerised Mobilising System ("CMS") interface sent to commanders' phones); and printed paper reports at the Mobile Command Unit.

755. The FSD Messenger was an important means of communication, through which the FSCC would send messages to front-line firemen via chat group set up in the FSD Messenger. The messages would be sent by captured images of the CMS.

756. This mechanism involved significant manual work both on the sending and the receiving sides:

(i) Information received by the FSCC personnel during the calls was typed into the CMS, and the FSCC staff then used a mobile device to take a photograph of the information shown in the CMS interface on the computer screen. The image was then sent through the FSD Messenger.

(ii) Frontline commanders received up to several hundred images in a single group chat, each of which had to be individually opened, read and logged.

757. DCFO Sunny Wong explained that this procedure was implemented because frontline personnel were unable to directly access the information on the FSCC's CMS at the scene of the fire. This chain of communication was rudimentary and obviously inefficient.

758. The FSD acknowledged that a large number of calls recorded at the scene of the fire had been duplicated, and that this caused difficulties in operations. Over 600 assistance requests were sent through the FSD Messenger. After deduplication, these requests were confirmed to relate to only 309 individual locations.

759. In addition to 999 calls, 195 assistance requests were also received by the FSD personnel at the scene and 34 assistance requests were received by the FSD through the DCP (which obtained information from various sources such as the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre operated by the Security Bureau).

760. This information was collated by staff in the Mobile Command Unit at the scene. The assistance requests were then relayed to frontline personnel.

E3. Handling of assistance requests

761. In total, after deduplication, the FSD received 373 unique assistance requests relating to 347 units.

762. Given the challenging conditions facing the firefighters as described above, only a limited number of assistance requests could be attended to at the initial stage of the fire. Requests from blocks that remained substantially unaffected by the fire – where the immediate danger to residents was lower – were not actioned in that period, as resources were prioritised for the blocks in greatest danger.

763. Consequently, some assistance requests from Wang Chi House (Block H) and Wang Kin House (Block D) were only attended to up to nine hours after the requests. At the height of the incident, there was a backlog of 174 outstanding assistance requests.

764. A breakdown of the number of assistance requests received and handled over the course of the fire is set out in the following table:

	Requests Received	**Requests Handled**
26 November		
14:51 – 15:59 hours	55	0
16:00 – 17:59 hours	34	5
18:00 – 19:59 hours	82	8
20:00 – 21:59 hours	9	15
22:00 – 23:59 hours	17	16
27 November		
00:00 – 03:59 hours	34	46
04:00 – 07:59 hours	71	64
08:00 – 11:59 hours	13	38
12:00 – 15:59 hours	7	63
16:00 – 19:59 hours	32	55
20:00 – 23:59 hours	10	27
28 November		
00:00 – 03:59 hours	1	15
04:00 – 07:59 hours	1	4
08:00 – 11:59 hours	7	7
12:00 – 15:59 hours	0	1

Table 7-2: Assistance requests received and handled by the FSD during rescue operations

765. For those awaiting rescue, the Support Centre operated a call-back mechanism. The Support Centre telephoned callers who had previously requested assistance to obtain updates on their condition and location and to provide safety guidance. Over the course of the fire, 1,581 call-backs were placed, of which 741 calls were answered and 840 went unanswered. The Committee heard evidence that these calls provided those awaiting rescue with some measures of reassurance.

766. All in all, the firefighters rescued 63 people alive and recovered 106 fatalities from the scene. The firefighters also recovered 60 pets and 62 pet bodies.

767. Among these rescues were two workers on the roof of Wang Tai House (Block E), who were located by the firefighters by drone at around 00:20 hours and rescued at around 02:15 hours on 27 November 2025. The rescues continued throughout that day, including rescues at 15/F and 28/F of Wang Cheong House (Block F) at around 12:00 hours. The last person rescued alive from the fire was an individual found in the staircase of Wang Tao House (Block B) at around 18:30 hours.

E4. Review of the Handling of Emergency Calls and Assistance Requests

768. The Committee makes the following observations about the handling of the emergency calls and assistance requests relating to the fire.

(I) Communications with 999 callers

769. First, the FSCC was unable to cope with the volume of 999 calls received during the early stage of the fire. It was unsatisfactory for distressed callers to be kept on hold for 15 minutes, and the waiting time

resulted in some callers hanging up before their calls were answered. It is true that conditions at the scene effectively prevented firefighters from entering the buildings to carry out rescues at that stage. However, prompt advice from the FSCC could well have affected the decisions of residents on whether to stay put or evacuate.

770. The then maximum capacity of the FSCC was limited to 30 lines, and so there was a bottleneck on the capacity on the part of the FSCC to handle the calls. While the scale of the fire at WF Court was unprecedented, and yet the FSD should try to explore whether there are ways, in particular through the use of new technology, to improve the capacity to handle the emergency calls in fire of such a large scale.

771. The FSD's recent enhancements to its emergency call handling systems, announced in the course of the Evidential Hearing, are therefore much needed and welcome. The FSD has increased the number of available lines to 68 and expects to increase further to 100 when the Fourth Generation Mobilising System is rolled out in 2027. These improvements will need to be coupled with adequate staffing levels and surge capacity if a repeat of the situation on the day of the fire is to be avoided.

772. Second, measures should have been taken to ensure that calls relating to fire should be transferred as soon as possible to the FSCC for handling. Unlike the situations in some other parts of the world, Hong Kong only has one number for all the emergency calls. There is of course a lot of wisdom in adopting such kind of system, as the public do not need to remember different numbers for different emergencies. Indeed, a lot of emergency cases may require the involvement of different departments, and so there is a lot of sense in using one number for all emergency calls.

773. However, this system requires good coordination between the different departments. Some of the callers were requested to supply the same information twice to operators at the RCCC and the FSCC. The Committee acknowledges that, for operational experience and safety reasons, there is a need for the operators at the FSCC to verify the information from the callers to avoid any possible mistakes in the communication. Nevertheless, the FSD and the Police should streamline the information obtaining process so that the callers do not need to repeat the information twice, considering that the callers may be in panic and are desperately seeking for assistance at moments of distress. Whilst it is not a criticism about the system itself, the Committee suggests that there should be a joint effort by the FSD and the Police to review whether information can be obtained and passed between departments in a more seamless manner. From the closing submissions of the Counsel for the Government, the Committee understands that such a review would be conducted in the near future.

774. Third, as mentioned above, there were two identified instances where 999 calls were not transferred to the FSCC for handling. Given that the firefighters faced great difficulties at the early stage of the fire, the Committee cannot speculate as to what would have happened had these calls been transferred for handling. But at least, it would have provided more information to the firefighters at the scene for the planning of their rescue operations. Since there is an established protocol for the transfer of the calls and the call operators should have been properly trained, the Committee has reasons to believe that the non-transference of the calls were individual incidents caused by the oversight on the part of the relevant 999 Operators.

775. Fourth, the FSD should consider establishing mechanisms for personnel at the scene to relay critical information to the FSCC call operators, so as to minimise confusion during calls and ensure that call

operators can offer appropriate advice to callers. For example, some call operators were confused by reports of fire in blocks other than Wang Cheong House (Block F), unaware that the fire had spread. It would also have been useful for the call operators to know that a floor-by-floor evacuation operation was being conducted in certain blocks, so that they could advise residents to evacuate if possible.

(II) Communication of information to frontline personnel

776. There is also room for improvement in the manner in which assistance requests were collated and transmitted to personnel at the scene.

777. First, DCFO Sunny Wong testified that, where 999 calls were disconnected before they could be patched from the Police to the FSCC, the Police would relay the caller's information to the FSCC by fax or email. As the Government acknowledges, fax in particular was a dated medium inadequate for conveying urgent, life-critical information in a large-scale incident in 2025. In any event, a formalised mechanism is necessary to ensure that information is not delayed, overlooked or lost. In the case of the WF Court fire, there was an instance where an assistance request made by a 999 caller was only received by the FSD over 30 minutes later through other means.[85]

778. Second, the Police and the FSD may need to consider mechanisms for sharing information between the CEU and the FSCC. There were instances where friends and relatives of trapped residents called the CEU's hotline enquiring about the status of their loved ones, but the FSD only became aware of persons potentially trapped in their flats much later. For example, the CEU first received an enquiry regarding Madam Pak Shui

85 For example, a 999 call was received by the Police at 21:26 hours but was only received by the FSD from a person at the scene on 22:11 hours.

Lin of Flat 1701, Wang Tai House (Block E) at 18:31 hours, but the FSD first logged an assistance request regarding her at 19:19 hours, some 48 minutes later. In three cases, the FSCC's assistance requests were created more than a day after enquiries had first been made to the CEU.

779. Third, the FSD must consider upgrading its computerised systems so that assistance requests can be catalogued and relayed effectively. Frontline personnel had no means of viewing the CMS at the scene. As a result, on the day of the fire, the FSCC operators photographed the CMS interface on a computer screen and sent the image to the frontline through FSD Messenger, where commanders had to open each photograph to read its contents. This meant that frontline staff received over 600 photographs of the CMS interface on the day of the fire. This laborious and rudimentary means of conveying life-critical information entailed a risk of human error, gave rise to many duplicated assistance requests, and took up precious time which the frontline staff could have devoted to the rescue effort. The Government candidly accepts in its Counsel's closing submissions that this was a "*weakness in the information relay mechanism*" and improvements are eagerly awaited.

780. In the reverse direction, records of assistance cases received or completed at the scene were consolidated by frontline personnel and sent back to the FSCC by way of Excel spreadsheets, which the FSCC staff then had to type manually into the CMS. This again appears unnecessarily cumbersome and inefficient, especially having regard to the time-sensitive nature of the FSD's work.

781. The Committee is given to understand that effort has been made to upgrade the system to Fourth Generation Mobilising System, which will automate the transmission of assistance request information to all parties simultaneously with a view to eliminating the manual steps that characterised the operation on 26 November 2025.

(III) Call-back mechanism

782. With a view to supporting the residents being trapped in the buildings, the Support Centre, established at 15:20 hours on the DFS's instruction, made approximately 1,500 call-back phone calls during the operation to update the conditions and locations of the affected residents and to provide ongoing safety advice. The call-back mechanism provided personalised, ongoing communication with trapped residents. The Committee agrees it was an initiative that proved its value under the most demanding circumstances. It provided reassurance and advice to persons awaiting rescue. Indeed, some of the residents giving evidence in the Inquiry had expressed their gratitude to the operators of the call-back mechanism for the support they obtained in the most difficult times.

783. Yet, as pointed out by the Legal Team, there were some miscommunications in these call-back calls. For example, Madam Chong Sio Pek, whose mother perished in Wang Sun House (Block C), recounted that a firefighter took her elder sister's telephone number when she pressed for her mother's rescue, yet the calls her elder sister later received from the FSD enquired about Madam Chong's elder sister's safety, not that of her mother who was trapped inside the building.

784. Given the volume of assistance calls and the absence of any dedicated system by the FSD to catalogue and track them, the information available to operators may have been incomplete or misread under pressure. Yet, the Committee agrees with the Legal Team that there are certainly areas for improvement in the call-back mechanism:

(i) The FSD deployed 80 personnel to operate the call-back mechanism. However, the Support Centre only had a maximum of 18 telephone lines which could be used at any given time.

(ii) The FSD's operational procedures provide that callers awaiting assistance are to be contacted at reasonable intervals of approximately 15 to 20 minutes until they are rescued or brought to safety. With the volume of assistance requests faced by the FSD, this target was not met. Indeed, some trapped residents were only called back several hours after their requests had been logged.[86]

(iii) Of the 373 assistance requests received by the FSD, call-backs were only conducted for approximately half (191) of them. For the remainder, the FSD had no contact details, whether of the informant or of any persons who might have been trapped inside. The FSD will have to consider how to gather such information systematically in the future so as to maximise the utility of its call-back mechanism.

(iv) Call operators had little information on the status of assistance requests. In many instances, call operators asked informants whether their family members or loved ones had yet been rescued by the FSD. On other occasions, operators called informants despite having been told in earlier calls that their loved ones had already been rescued.

(v) The advice given to trapped residents varied. While most residents were advised to avoid smoke and seal door gaps with wet towels, not all were asked about the smoke conditions around them – even though under the FSD's own policies, residents should have been advised to check whether the corridor and staircases were smoke-free –and, if

86 For example, the FSD first logged an assistance request at 01:36 hours on 27 November 2025, but only placed a phone call under the call-back mechanism at 17:08 hours.

so, to attempt an escape. The FSD may also wish to consider the advisability of asking callers a general question of whether they were "safe" when this does not admit of a straightforward "yes" or "no" answer for persons trapped in a burning building.

(vi) The FSD had contact details of some trapped persons which, as far as the available records show, the FSD did not attempt to contact under the call-back mechanism.

(vii) Information was also passed from the call-back mechanism back to the frontline in a haphazard manner. According to DCFO Sunny Wong, only one staff member in the Support Centre could input data into the CMS, owing to data security concerns. Alternatively, information was delivered to the FSCC in person by Support Centre staff members, the Support Centre being located four floors above the FSCC in the same building. This necessarily affected how quickly the FSD could adjust its operations in light of information received through the call-back mechanism.

785. The Committee fully appreciates that such kinds of miscommunications and mishandlings were bound to happen in a fire of such magnitude, when rescue personnel were all working under extreme pressure in the face of a disaster of an unprecedented scale. Yet, we must reflect deeply on such a tragic incident. It is true that the FSD and the Police had been attaching utmost importance to the fire from the outset. The DCP was set up by the DFS as early as 15:20 hours with additional staff deployed in the FSCC to deal with incoming calls. They were doing the best they could under the then call-handling system, and the call-back mechanism (operated with the additional personnel provided) was also essential in helping residents trapped inside the burning buildings to stay

calm waiting for rescue. In any event, the Committee welcomes the news that there will be a joint review of 999 emergency call handling procedures by the FSD and the Police.

F. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE FIREFIGHTING AND EVACUATION EFFORTS AND THE PROCEDURES HANDLING EMERGENCY CALLS

786. The fire at WF Court was unprecedented in both its scale and its circumstances. No other fire in recent memory has engulfed multiple high-rise buildings, still less at such velocity.

787. The inferno involved seven high-rise residential blocks in full scale and close succession. Each building was extensively covered with renovation-related and combustible materials along their external façades and re-entrants, completely compromising the buildings' fire compartments, fire-resisting construction requirements and FSIs, such that once the fire reached a certain magnitude, it became self-sustaining. The immense and inter-connected fire load present across numerous units and within the building envelop, coupled with temperature sufficient to continuously ignite adjacent combustible materials under windy and dry weather, presented exceptional operational challenges to the firefighters.

788. The FSD faced a difficult task on the day of the fire, one made even more so by falling debris, disabled fire alarms and the modified worker access openings in the staircases. ADO Cheung, one of the initial Incident Commanders, acknowledged that the FSD's operational strategies were simply not designed for a fire of this nature.

789. The evidence shows that the FSD knew from the outset that they were facing a major crisis and additional resources had been deployed accordingly. The DCP and the Support Centre were set up speedily. Even before the escalation of the fire alarms, the FS resources deployed at the scene far exceeded the required deployment under the pre-determined attendance of the then corresponding level of alarm fire.

790. The Committee also heard many examples of firefighters putting their personal safety at risk in order to save lives. They are to be commended for their heroism in such perilous circumstances.

791. Having reviewed the firefighting and evacuation efforts and the procedures handling emergency calls and requests for assistance in respect of the fire, the Committee takes the view that the FSD and the Police had on the whole done the best they could, under the then existing operating mechanism, to cope with the fire of an unprecedented scale.

792. It is easy to criticise every decision made by the commanding officers at the scene with the benefit of hindsight. However, the fire scene was like a war zone. The commanding officers would not have had the benefit of knowing all the details that would have been made available to the Committee subsequently in the Inquiry. They had to make tactical judgments to deal with chaotic situations at the scene of the fire. Some of the decisions would not have been easy to make, for example, whether the FSD should have concentrated most available manpower to suppress the fire in Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E) to slow its progression towards the remaining, as yet unaffected blocks, or to respond to the calls for assistance from residents in the other buildings. The question of which option would have produced the better outcome is one that even hindsight may not be able to provide a complete answer. In the opinion of the Committee, no criticism should be made against any of the operational decisions made by the commanding officers at the fire scene.

793. Nevertheless, it is necessary to seriously identify areas for improvement and lessons to be learned in the firefighting and rescue operations. To the extent that the operational strategies were not hitherto designed for fires of this nature, it is now incumbent to do so. Where, as the Government accepts, the fire revealed areas for improvement in the Police and the FSD's operational decisions and systemic arrangements, it will be necessary to consider how these improvements are to be made. It is hoped that the evaluations conducted in this Chapter will assist in enhancing their capabilities in dealing with mega-scale fires.

794. Finally, there can be no dispute that prevention is better than cure. The DFS testified that there is at present "*no obviously superior firefighting or fundamentally different operational approach that fire brigades elsewhere could realistically have adopted to contain such a conflagration effectively under the circumstances*". Consequently, "*the strategic focus should shift from how to extinguish the fully developed blaze to how to prevent its occurrence or limit its development at the very initial stage*". This evidence was echoed by other witnesses from the FSD.

795. In any event, evaluation of tactical firefighting plan and deployment of resources should proceed side by side with the review of fire preventive measures. The former requires the rescuing authorities to plan for the worst and review their operational procedures and equipment so that they can better cope with fires of such magnitude in the future. This task also requires a critical evaluation of the response by the FSD and the Police on the day of the fire, to ensure that lessons are learnt for the future. That evaluation should not, however, detract from our collective gratitude for the gallantry, dedication and personal sacrifice of the firefighters who fought the fire.

CHAPTER 8
DEATH OF SENIOR FIREMAN HO WAI HO AND REVIEW OF THE OPERATION PROCEDURES AND EQUIPMENT RELATING TO HIS DEATH

796. The fire in WF Court resulted in 168 fatalities, including Fireman Ho. In this Chapter, the Committee will review:

(i) Section A: the circumstances leading to and the cause of Fireman Ho's death;

(ii) Section B: the operation procedures and equipment relating to Fireman Ho's death;

(iii) Section C: Conclusion.

A. CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO AND THE CAUSE OF FIREMAN HO'S DEATH

797. The IFITF has examined the circumstances leading to and the cause of Fireman Ho's death in some detail in its Final Report submitted to the Committee in May 2026. Having conducted a careful review, the Committee endorses such findings which will be set out below.

A1. The dispatch to answer the call for assistance

798. Fireman Ho was a 37-year-old firefighter, who tragically sustained serious injuries and lost his life in the line of duty during the fire at WF Court.

799. On 26 November 2025, Fireman Ho was a crew member of Sha Tin Fire Station Light Rescue Unit. He began his shift that day at 09:00 hours. In accordance with usual FSD procedures, Fireman Ho conducted a daily test of his breathing apparatus set at 09:30 hours. No defects were found. As part of the same testing process, he recorded that the remaining air content of his gas cylinder was 285 bar, which would have provided a working duration of approximately 30 minutes.

800. The Sha Tin Fire Station Light Rescue Unit was one of the first fire appliances to be deployed to the WF Court scene in response to the No 1 alarm fire. It arrived at the scene at 15:01:34 hours. Upon arrival, the Sha Tin Fire Station Light Rescue Unit was initially assigned to assist the crews of the Sha Tin Fire Station Major Pump in laying hoses.

801. At about 15:03 hours, SStnO Hui received a radio message from the FSCC informing him of an assistance call from Flat 2701 of Wang Cheong House (Block F). He then instructed Probationary Station Officer Liao Kong Lap ("PStnO Liao") to respond to the aforesaid assistance call, who in turn instructed Fireman Ho and two other Sha Tin Fire Station Light Rescue Unit crew members, Fireman Yeung Ching ("Fireman Yeung") and Fireman Siu Tsz Ho("Fireman Siu"), to do so.

802. In accordance with PStnO Liao's instructions, at around 15:15 hours, Fireman Ho, Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu proceeded towards Wang Cheong House (Block F). In the course of doing so, they passed by the bicycle parking area (as indicated "1" in Figure 8-1(a) on G/F of Wang Tai House (Block E), when they encountered a group of residents evacuating from the building (as shown in Figure 8-1(b)). Fireman Ho stopped to assist an elderly female on a wheelchair at Wang Tai House, while Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu did not notice Fireman Ho's action and continued proceeding towards Wang Cheong House (as shown in Figure 8-1(c)).



Figure 8-1(a): Location Map Showing Fireman Ho, Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu



Figure 8-1(b): CCTV screenshot of Fireman Ho, Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu entering the Bicycle Parking Area of Wang Tai House (Block E) at 15:12 hours[87]

87 Although the CCTV footage was time-stamped at 15:13 hours, it was approximately 61 seconds ahead the reference time, making the actual time approximately 15:12 hours.



Figure 8-1(c): CCTV screenshot of Fireman Ho assisting an elderly female

803. The evidence from Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu is that, when they reached Wang Cheong House (Block F) and surveyed the area, they saw that all the entrances had been blocked by flaming debris. They therefore commenced firefighting operations near the main entrance. The location is indicated "2" in Figure 8-1(a). They noticed several firefighters in heat resistant suits nearby who were assisting in the firefighting effort and believed that Fireman Ho was among them. They therefore did not notice that Fireman Ho had gone missing.

804. Meanwhile, CCTV footage showed that Fireman Ho entered the lift lobby of Wang Tai House (Block E) at about 15:17 hours and took the lift to 25/F with his breathing apparatus donned.

805. The figures below (taken from the CCTV footage) show: (i) Fireman Ho passing through the bicycle parking area (approximately 15 seconds after Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu had passed through); (ii) Fireman Ho turning right and proceeding to the front entrance of Wang

Tai House (Block E), instead of proceeding across the courtyard towards Wang Cheong House (Block F); (iii) Fireman Ho entering Wang Tai House; and (iv) Fireman Ho exiting the fireman's lift at 25/F of Wang Tai House. It is noted that the area outside G/F of Wang Tai House was already filled with smoke, whereas the 25/F corridor remained relatively clear at that point.



Figures 8-2: Still images taken from CCTV footage of bicycle parking area, front entrance and firemen's lift of Wang Tai House (Block E) (at 15:13:49, 15:13:53, 15:15:00 and 15:15:54 hours[88] respectively)

806. At 15:22 hours, Fireman Ho dispatched a Mayday message by means of his radio telephone. According to SStnO Hui, he heard a Mayday message through his radio telephone. The message read: "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, ……，而家被困喺 30 樓

88 These times refer to the times shown in the CCTV screenshots, which were approximately two minutes behind reference time.

(translated as "now trapped on 30/F")". SStnO Hui was only able to recognise the words "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday" and "now trapped on 30/F". SStnO Hui then responded via radio telephone: "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, 你喺咩位置 (translated as "where is your position")". However, SStnO Hui could not hear any response. At that time, SStnO Hui did not know the number and identity of the distressed member or members nor the exact building he or they was or were in.

807. PStnO Liao and Fireman Yeung both heard the message. The message they received was: "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, 我係沙田細搶救隊員 18469 何偉豪，而家被困喺 30 樓 (translated as "I am Sha Tin Light Rescue Unit Crew Member 18469 Ho Wai Ho, now trapped on 30/F")". However, Fireman Ho did not specify which building he was in.

A2. The rescue operation

808. SStnO Hui immediately initiated rescue operations. By that time, the fire at Wang Cheong House (Block F) was extremely severe with heavy smoke. Since the fire originated at Wang Cheong House, SStnO Hui assessed that the distressed member or members was or were most likely trapped on 30/F of that building. SStnO Hui formed a total of five Emergency Response Teams ("ERTs") to conduct a search for Fireman Ho on 30/F of Wang Cheong House. However, since the entrance to Wang Cheong House was obstructed by burning bamboos and other fallen articles, the ERTs could not enter the building. Subsequently, PStnO Liao confirmed with SStnO Hui that the distressed member was Fireman Ho and requested to join the 5th ERT to conduct a search for Fireman Ho on 30/F of Wang Cheong House.

809. SStnO Hui instructed the crews of the Tai Po Fire Station Major Pump and Tai Po Fire Station Hydraulic Platform to extinguish the fire outside Wang Cheong House (Block F) and to clear access to the interior. This action was intended to enable the ERTs and other FS members to enter Wang Cheong House and to carry out the rescue operation for Fireman Ho.

810. At approximately 15:55 hours, Fireman Ho was found by two firemen lying unconscious on top of the burning scaffolding outside Wang Tai House (Block E) (in the area facing Flats 1 and 8), as shown in Figure 8-3.

811. Nearby firemen immediately removed Fireman Ho to a place of safety, rendered ambulance aid and handed over to Ambulance A195 at 16:05 hours at scene. Most unfortunately, Fireman Ho was later certified dead at 16:41 hours.



Figure 8-3: Photo showing the location where Fireman Ho was found

A3. Examinations carried out after the incident

(I) Autopsy

812. The autopsy revealed that Fireman Ho had sustained extensive skin burns on various body parts and inflammation of air passage, indicating thermal injuries and inhalation of smoke and hot gas produced during the fire. The toxicological analysis detected 26% saturation of carboxyhaemoglobin in Fireman Ho's blood. In addition, soot deposits were found in Fireman Ho's airways and lungs. These findings indicated that Fireman Ho had been exposed to the fire and smoke without wearing his breathing apparatus for a period of time before his death.

813. The autopsy also revealed that Fireman Ho had sustained head injuries and fractures localised to the left side of his body (left sided ribs, left pelvis, left shoulder, left arm bone and left forearm bones). These findings suggest that Fireman Ho might have fallen from height, which resulted in impact on the left side of his body against a wide, hard and unyielding surface.

814. Given the location and severity of these injuries, it was unlikely for these injuries to be rapidly fatal by themselves. However, the associated injuries to brain and cervical spinal cord might have caused reduced conscious level and limb weakness or paralysis, leading to the physical incapacitation that rendered Fireman Ho incapable of removing himself from the dangerous environment of the fire.

815. The autopsy identified the cause of death of Fireman Ho as being the inhalation of fire fumes and extensive burns with head and neck injuries as a significant contributing condition.

(II) Examination of the Personal Protective Equipment ("PPE") and other related equipment carried by Fireman Ho

816. When Fireman Ho was found outside Wang Tai House (Block E), he was observed wearing the following uniform and PPE:

(i) station T-shirt (short sleeves) and No 3 trousers[89];

(ii) PBI Matrix tunic and trousers[90];

(iii) anti-flash hood;

(iv) fire-retardant glove[91] on his right hand, while the left-hand glove was missing; and

(v) radio telephone.

817. The helmet, MSA Safety Incorporated breathing apparatus set and full-face mask belonging to Fireman Ho were found in the lift lobby on 31/F by the crew of the Fan Ling Fire Station Hydraulic Platform. Considering the set could be used as alternative rescue breathing aid, they took the breathing apparatus set and the full-face mask to the roof floor. However, the breathing apparatus cylinder was found to be empty, and so they subsequently left the breathing apparatus set and the face mask on the ground of the roof floor.

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89 Worn for daily operational duties by firemen, distinct from heavy structural turnout/fire-fighting protective gear.

90 These are advanced structural fire-fighting protective garments which can withstand extreme temperatures up to 1,093°C. Also see para 820(i) below.

91 In accordance with EN 659:2003, fire-retardant glove shall withstand contact heat at 250°C for 10 seconds and radiant heat flux of 40 kW/m² for 20 seconds.

818. Additionally, Fireman Ho's left-hand glove and a hammer were found on the window sill of the lift lobby on 31/F of Wang Tai House (Block E), near the broken window between Flats 1 and 8, as shown in Figures 8-4 and 8-5. The boots belonging to Fireman Ho were recovered separately at ground floor outside Wang Tai House, as shown in Figure 8-5.



Figure 8-4: Photo showing the window sill on 31/F



Figure 8-5: Map indicating the location of the broken window on 31/F

819. The post-fire visual inspection revealed that Fireman Ho might have been in prolonged contact with hot or burning objects, resulting in severe fire damage to his station T-shirt, No 3 trousers, PBI Matrix tunic and trousers, anti-flash hood and his helmet.

820. The PPE was found to have complied with the following standards:

(i) in accordance with EN 469:2020, PBI Matrix tunic and trousers shall withstand flame combustion at 1,093°C for up to eight seconds;

(ii) in accordance with EN 13911:2017, anti-flash hood shall be non-flammable and capable of withstanding flame combustion at 260°C for five minutes without melting or dripping; and

(iii) in accordance with EN 443:2008, helmets shall be resistant to flame combustion at 900-1,000°C for up to 10 seconds and to radiant heat for up to 480 seconds, and shall have impact resistance against 5 kg weight and penetration resistance against 1 kg sharp object impact.

821. No unusual damage was observed on Fireman Ho's anti-flash hood and helmet, except that there was a crack in the visor which might have been caused by contact with a sharp or hard object either prior to or during the fire.

822. The post-fire visual inspection revealed that Fireman Ho's rubber boots might have also been in prolonged contact with hot or burning objects, resulting in severe fire damage. As the boots are designed to provide protection against fire in accordance with EN 15090:2012[92], it is believed that the intense heat or flames exceeded the boots' protective capacity over an extended period.

(III) Examination of the breathing apparatus set

823. The breathing apparatus set carried by Fireman Ho had been recovered and examined by the FSD. Figure 8-6 below shows Fireman Ho's breathing apparatus set seized at the scene.



Figure 8-6: A photo showing Fireman Ho's breathing apparatus set seized at the scene

92 In accordance with EN 15090:2012, firefighting boots shall withstand flame combustion at 250°C for up to 10 minutes.

824. Subsequent examination and testing of Fireman Ho's breathing apparatus set and ancillary equipment revealed that:

(i) The fabric bag enclosing Fireman Ho's breathing apparatus had been damaged, the cylinder valve had been damaged and the gas cylinder was empty.

(ii) Fireman Ho's alphaSCOUT ("SCOUT") device (an electronic device attached to the breathing apparatus designed to record gas consumption and emit noise if no movement is detected) suffered from data loss due to submersion in water (which was the result of the action of the fire crews as mentioned in paragraph 817 above)[93].

(iii) The personal transmitter of the Firefighter Locator System ("FLS") attached to Fireman Ho's breathing apparatus (which emits a radio signal enabling SAR Teams to locate firefighters in distress) was not actuated. FLS would be actuated if the red magnetic key attached to it was pulled out. The key was, however, still inserted in Fireman Ho's unit.

825. The SCOUT is a personal protection and monitoring device of the MSA Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus ("SCBA"). It is automatically turned on when the cylinder valve of the SCBA is opened. The personal alarm system is essential to the safety of the wearer. Under

93 The SCBA set of Fireman Ho was subsequently found and removed from the water-covered floor on roof floor of Wang Tai House (Block E) at about 17:33 hours on 27 November 2025. An examination conducted by an MSA technician on 1 December 2025 revealed signs of corrosion on the SCOUT consistent with water exposure. Rust accumulation was noted within the battery compartment, and water infiltration into the motherboard was identified. The device was found to be inoperable. The IFITF believed that submersion in water for approximately 16 hours caused the damage to the SCOUT.

no circumstances should crew members be allowed to enter the fire scene if the SCOUT is found to be defective or not functioning properly.

826. When the full alarm is activated (i.e. in the Full Alarm Mode), the SCOUT will start to sound and flash. The full alarm can be activated in the following two situations:

(i) motion alarm: the full alarm will automatically be activated when the motion of the wearer cannot be detected with a time period of 30 seconds; or

(ii) manual alarm: the wearer can manually activate the alarm by pressing the alarm button of the SCOUT when assistance is required.

827. On the other hand, the FLS is a personal alert safety system device that protects firefighters. It is an electronic system mainly consisting of two items, namely the personal transmitter and handheld receiver.

828. Upon the post-fire examination of the breathing apparatus set of Fireman Ho, the personal transmitter of the FLS was found attached to the waist straps with the red magnetic key still inserted, as shown in Figure 8-6. The breathing apparatus set tally ("BA Set Tally") was also found attached to the set.

829. Under the FSD's prevailing procedures, a FLS personal transmitter is activated by a firefighter at an Entry Control Point by removing the attached red magnetic key and handing it to the Entry Control Officer. After the personal transmitter is activated, in the event that the firefighter is motionless for 45 seconds or manually activates the alarm

button, the personal transmitter would emit audible and visual alarms and transmit a radio signal with its unique identifier which can be detected by firefighters using a handheld receiver. Emergency rescue teams would then be able to rely on the radio signal to locate the crew member in distress.

830. However, as Fireman Ho did not pass through any Entry Control Point when entering Wang Tai House (Block E), the red magnetic key was never removed from his personal transmitter. SStnO Hui explained that the intention was to set up an Entry Control Point within Wang Cheong House (Block F), but firefighters had not been able to gain access to the block due to the obstruction of the entrances. In any event, Fireman Ho did not enter Wang Cheong House and entered Wang Tai House instead.

831. DO Tung testified that the FSD had no clear hypothesis for how the cylinder valve came to be damaged. He noted that this was a very rare occurrence, as the cylinder valve was made of durable metal and was protected by a rubber shock absorber. One possibility was that it was damaged from a hard impact. However, it was not possible to ascertain when the impact occurred. Regrettably, no data could be recovered from the SCOUT, with the result that the FSD could not obtain much information about Fireman Ho's last moments.

832. The concerned breathing apparatus passed the half-yearly test on 9 October 2025, which was about seven weeks prior to the incident. Additionally, a daily test was conducted by Fireman Ho on the day of the fire at 09:30 hours with no defect detected. It is therefore reasonably believed that the breathing apparatus set, including the face mask and the SCOUT, was in efficient working order.

833. As shown in the CCTV footage, Fireman Ho entered Wang Tai House (Block E) and took the lift to 25/F with breathing apparatus donned and no abnormalities were noted during the process.

834. Regarding his experience of wearing breathing apparatus, Fireman Ho was qualified as a MSA breathing apparatus wearer on 13 February 2017 and subsequently wore breathing apparatus in numerous incidents throughout his service. Records also indicate that Fireman Ho attended his last monthly practice on 3 October 2025, demonstrating that he was a competent and experienced breathing apparatus wearer.

(IV) IFITF'S OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE DEATH OF FIREMAN HO

835. The IFITF made the following findings and observations about the circumstances leading to the death of Fireman Ho:

(i) Fireman Ho, Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu, forming a team of three, were instructed to respond to an assistance call at Flat 2701, Wang Cheong House (Block F). However, Fireman Ho was separated from the rest of the team because he was providing assistance to evacuees at the bicycle parking area on the ground floor level of Wang Tai House (Block E).

(ii) At around 15:17 hours, Fireman Ho was captured on CCTV accessing 25/F of Wang Tai House (Block E) via the lift with his breathing apparatus donned. From the surrounding circumstances, it can be inferred that Fireman Ho had

mistakenly believed that he was at Wang Cheong House (Block F) when he was, in fact, at Wang Tai House.

(iii) Fireman Ho likely believed that the rest of the team had already reached 27/F. In an attempt to rejoin his crew, Fireman Ho took the lift to 25/F, two floors below the reported location. Since stopping the lift at least two floors below the affected or reported floor is a standard safety precautionary measure when using a fireman's lift, it is believed that Fireman Ho was executing his assigned order and approaching Flat 2701 of Wang Cheong House (Block F) at that moment.

(iv) Based on the post-fire investigation, including reviewing the CCTV and other video footages and the witness statements of the surviving witnesses, the IFITF believes that the conditions deteriorated rapidly shortly after Fireman Ho arrived on 25/F (with details already set out in sub-section D2 of Chapter 5). It was also revealed that multiple fatalities were located on 31/F and the roof floor, further highlighting the severe conditions in those areas.

(v) Equipped with proper PPE and breathing apparatus, Fireman Ho was fully capable of escaping from Wang Tai House (Block E) upon noting the deteriorating situation. However, it is believed that he stayed on in Wang Tai House in an attempt to assist the evacuation of other residents.

(vi) Based on the recovery of Fireman Ho's breathing apparatus set, full-face mask, helmet and hammer on 31/F of Wang Tai House (Block E), together with the broken window at the lift lobby, it is reasonably believed that Fireman Ho had placed

down his equipment before attempting to climb out of the building to the external scaffolding via the window as shown in Figure 8-4, as this might be the only option available for him at the moment either to seek assistance or to identify an alternative escape route. The autopsy report indicated that his injury pattern was consistent with a fall, supporting the inference that he exited the building structure through the scaffolding.

(vii) The IFITF found that there were then two possibilities: (a) that Fireman Ho was overcome by smoke inhalation, lost consciousness, and subsequently fell from height; or (b) that he fell while climbing the scaffolding, sustained incapacitating injuries, and later became unconscious. In the latter scenario, he might have remained on or near the scaffolding until it collapsed, resulting in a combined fall with the structure. Both possibilities are consistent with the autopsy findings of blunt force trauma, fractures, and smoke inhalation.

(viii) In either case, the evidence indicates that Fireman Ho was engaged in a valiant effort to escape or to obtain help under extreme conditions. His incapacitation, whether primarily due to smoke inhalation or traumatic injuries sustained during a fall, ultimately rendered him unable to remove himself from danger, leading to his tragic death.

(ix) The confirmed cause of death of Fireman Ho was determined to be the adverse effects of fire and the inhalation of fire fumes and smoke. Although the PPE was severely damaged due to prolonged contact with hot or burning objects, it continued to serve its intended purpose.

836. Having examined the findings of the IFITF relating to the circumstances leading to tragic death of Fireman Ho, the Committee accepts that the IFITF has carefully considered all the relevant factors in reaching these findings. Indeed, all such findings and observations are supported by objective evidence such as CCTV footages, other online videos, personal accounts of witnesses and findings in the autopsy report. As the fire had spread rapidly to Wang Tai House (Block E) resulting in the most difficult situation facing the firefighters, there was very little that Fireman Ho could have done to save his own life. The circumstances also made it extremely difficult for the ERTs to carry out any effective rescue operation.

B. REVIEW OF THE OPERATION PROCEDURES AND EQUIPMENT RELATING TO FIREMAN HO'S DEATH

B1. Breathing apparatus and other equipment

837. The Committee has heard evidence on the adequacy of the personal equipment worn by firefighters. The evidence from firefighters was that the provisions were of a high standard and are continually reviewed and upgraded.

838. In particular, DO Tung explained that the FSD had replaced its 6.7-litre, 7.5 kg air cylinders with 8-litre, 7.3 kg MSA air cylinders in May 2014, increasing air storage capacity while reducing the weight of air cylinders. In January 2026, the MSA air cylinders were further replaced with 8-litre, 7.1 kg Interspiro air cylinders, which were also equipped with a "TeamTalk" function to facilitate communication within teams and emergency breathing safety system to enable air-sharing between team members. The FSD has therefore reduced the weight of the breathing apparatus sets used by its firefighters over the years without compromising air capacity.

839. DO Tung also explained that although the FSD possesses twin-cylinder breathing apparatus equipment which would have allowed firefighters to remain at scene for an additional 20 minutes, these sets would have been much bulkier and heavier (20.5 kg versus 14.5 kg[94]), making it impractical for firefighters to carry them up and down staircases. Other forms of breathing apparatus such as a closed-circuit breathing apparatus (with a three-hour theoretical working duration) and the Airliner (with a theoretically infinite duration) were similarly unsuitable: the former could not be exposed to naked flames or radiant heat, whereas the latter required firefighters to be attached to an air hose with a maximum length of 90 metres.

840. Finally, as DO Tung explained, there were also practical reasons of operational safety for limiting firefighter working durations to 33 minutes, which is the theoretical working duration of the air cylinders the FSD used in the WF Court incident. The reasons being concerns regarding fatigue and heat stress.

841. As mentioned in paragraph 820 above, the PPE of Fireman Ho were found to have complied with the relevant standards.

842. For these reasons, the Committee is satisfied that the breathing apparatus and the PPE used by firefighters at WF Court were adequate and were not limiting factors for the FSD's operations on the day.

94 While the weight of the air cylinder used since January 2026 is 7.1 kg (see para 838), the total weight of the breathing apparatus set (including the air cylinder, electronic equipment, strip, etc.) comes to 14.5 kg.

B2. Operation procedures for firemen entering the fire scene

843. The evidence shows that Fireman Ho lost contact with his teammates and entered Wang Tai House (Block E) by mistakenly believing that he was actually entering Wang Cheong House (Block F). Questions may be asked as to whether such kind of mistake could have been avoided.

844. The IFITF's finding is that "*no negligence or non-observance of procedures was identified on the part of [Fireman] Ho or his team members*".

845. As mentioned above, Fireman Ho separated with Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu when he was providing assistance to an elderly evacuee in the bicycle parking area on the ground floor level of Wang Tai House (Block E). This was part of the job of the firefighters at the scene and Fireman Ho should be praised for performing his duty under such difficult circumstances.

846. For Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu, the IFITF found that, given the large number of residents evacuating and firefighters conducting firefighting operations in the vicinity, compounded by the fact that all firefighters were wearing full protective gear with their faces concealed by masks and helmets, it would have been extremely difficult for Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu to promptly notice the absence of Fireman Ho in the team. Furthermore, the team's original assignment was to proceed to Flat 2701 of Wang Cheong House (Block F). However, the ground-level entrance of Wang Cheong House was obstructed by burning scaffolding and debris at the time, and most firefighters were engaged in firefighting operations at that location. Facing such circumstances, it would have been reasonable to assume that Fireman Ho was amongst those firefighters, making it unlikely for Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu to suspect that Fireman Ho had mistakenly entered Wang Tai House (Block E).

847. The evidence shows that the firefighters arriving first at the scene found that they were placed in the most difficult situation, with the fire spreading to other buildings and bamboo poles and other objects falling from height blocking the usual escape routes. Further, the firefighters had to answer numerous calls for rescue and assistance. Given these circumstances, the situation would have been very chaotic in the ground area around Wang Cheong House (Block F) and Wang Tai House (Block E). The Committee agrees with the observation made by the IFITF that no individual should be blamed for the separation of the team members.

848. However, as rightly observed by Mr Dawes SC, the fact that there was no human error serves to illustrate that the problem may lie more deeply in the existing procedures themselves. The Committee will also examine whether there are other measures that should be taken to keep track of firefighters entering a fire scene.

(I) Measures to reduce the risk of separation

849. The FSD will need to consider measures to reduce the risk of firefighters becoming separated from other crew members at the scene of a fire. This may entail measures to enable firefighters to identify and keep track of their team members.

850. The evidence indicates it took only several seconds for Fireman Ho to be separated from his teammates. The presence of other firefighters nearby in identical gear meant that Fireman Yeung and Fireman Siu did not realise that Fireman Ho was missing.

(II) Measures to help firefighters to get better orientation of the fire scene

851. The FSD will also need to consider how to ensure that firefighters responding to fires in multi-block residential estates are able to differentiate between individual blocks.

852. The difficulties faced by frontline firefighters at WF Court were particularly grave given the lack of prominent signage on the ground (including some signage which was obscured by scaffolding).





Figures 8-7: Photos of entrance of Wang Tai House (Block E) before renovation works and entrance of Wang Cheong House (Block F) during renovation works

853. The FSD has told the Committee there are various ways to help the firemen know more about the fire scene including its physical layout. These measures include briefings at the Mobile Command Unit, provision of Geographic Information System and layout plans, and the use of the Mobile Data Terminal.

854. These tools, however, did not prevent the confusion described above. The FSD should therefore review how first responders at the scene are enabled to identify individual blocks in multi-block estates. The Government may also wish to require that, in multi-block estates undergoing large-scale BMR works, prominent signage be erected to identify each block and its entrances, and that such signage remain clearly visible notwithstanding any scaffolding or netting erected for the works. The FSD should also explore whether technology can help to dispatch more information about the layout of the subject building estate to the fire crew members before their arrival at the fire scene.

(III) Measures to establish a proper entry control system keeping track of the firefighters entering the fire scene

855. Under the FSD's operational guidelines, all firefighters are required to pass by an Entry Control Point (identified by an amber flashing lamp) before entering the fire scene. At the Entry Control Point, the team member serving as the Entry Control Officer is then required to complete a pre-entry checklist for the team members and record details on a handwritten Breathing Apparatus Operation Log Record ("BA Log Record"). FS Manual (Operational) Chapter 6, paragraph 5.16 provides that "*record will be kept for each and every wearer passing through the entry control point and such information will be forwarded to the respective stations for entry into the FS 91*".

856. Upon passing through the Entry Control Point, the Entry Control Officer will also ensure that the breathing apparatus of the firefighters are properly donned, that the cylinder contents are sufficient, and that the firefighters of the team are using the correct radio telephone channel. The Entry Control Officer will also calculate the working duration based on the air content of the member with the lowest air content and brief the team members on their specific assignment.

857. As DO Tung acknowledged, the BA Log Records generated during the firefighting operations were incomplete. The BA Log Records were handwritten. Some Entry Control Officers erased previous entries and overwrote them with new entries after log sheets had been used up. DO Tung accepted that there were "*extenuating circumstances under which this procedure might not have been fully observed*". Figure 8-8 below shows one of the BA Log Records for firemen entering Wang Cheong House (Block F) for the purpose of carrying out SAR operations on the day of the fire.

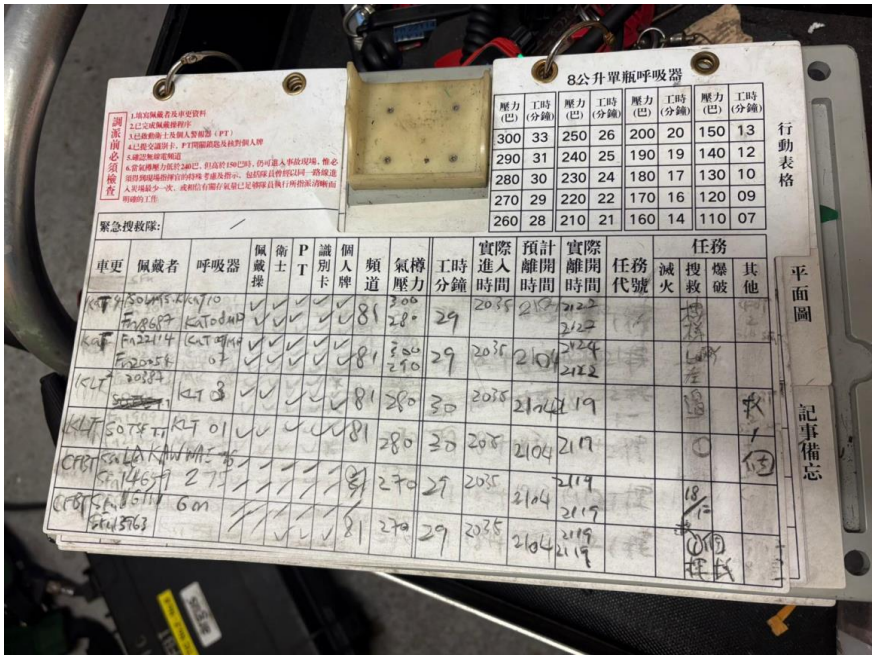


Figure 8-8: Photo showing one of the BA Log Records of Wang Cheong House (Block F)

858. The Entry Control Officer is also responsible for collecting from firemen entering the fire scene: (i) the red magnetic key of the personal transmitter of the FLS; and (ii) the BA Set Tally attached to the SCOUT on their breathing apparatus.

859. Since the entrances of Wang Cheong House (Block F) were blocked by falling debris, firefighters could not enter Wang Cheong House at the initial stage of the fire. Hence, no Entry Control Point was set up inside Wang Cheong House when the firefighters first arrived at the scene.

860. The Siu Lek Yuen Fire Station Light Rescue Unit, which was also assigned to handle the assistance request at Flat 2701 of Wang Cheong House (Block F), established their Entry Control Point next to Tai Po Baptist Public School at around 15:01 hours. It therefore seems that on the day of the fire, there was no plan or coordination, at least at the initial stage, as to where to set up the Entry Control Points.

861. According to DD(Ops) Chan , since most of the building fires originate from a fire in a particular unit, the Entry Control Point would usually be set up as near as possible to the target premises without being affected by smoke, say two floors below the target premises. Contrary to what lay persons may intuitively expect, it is not typical for Entry Control Points to be set up at the ground floor entrance of a building. That may explain why Fireman Ho entered Wang Tai House (Block E) despite the absence of an Entry Control Point at the main entrance of the building. Further, in accordance with the normal procedure, Fireman Ho took a fireman's lift to get to 25/F expecting to find the Entry Control Point at that location.

862. When the Mayday message was received, the officers responsible for the rescue operation believed that Fireman Ho was in Wang Cheong House (Block F). Since there was no proper Entry Control

mechanism established in the scene, the officers could not obtain any assistance from the Entry Control system in locating the fireman making the distress call. Believing that the caller was on 30/F of Wang Cheong House, SStnO Hui by then actually found that it was strange that a fireman could have reached such a high floor in Wang Cheong House, and yet he still believed that Fireman Ho was trapped in that particular building. In the opinion of the Committee, such misbelief was understandable given the limited information available to him and the severity of the fire in Wang Cheong House by that time.

863. Given the severe circumstances facing the firefighters when they first arrived at the scene, no individual should be blamed for the initial lack of proper Entry Control Points at WF Court. Indeed, according to the prevailing practice, Entry Control Points would have been set up for Wang Cheong House (Block F) to which the SAR Teams were sent, but not Wang Tai House (Block E) which Fireman Ho had inadvertently entered. The FSD should review the procedures for setting up proper Entry Control Points at the fire scene to enhance protection of the firefighters, in particular in the case of multi-block fires. Notification of the Entry Control Points should be given to all firefighters carrying out firefighting and SAR operations, in particular when the fire involves the participation of firemen coming from different fire stations. Proper instructions should also be given to firefighters in case they cannot locate the Entry Control Point, e.g. to retreat or to immediately activate their personal transmitters.

864. Furthermore, the FSD's prevailing procedures simply provide that "*the entry control point shall be set up in a safe and convenient place as near to the entrance of the affected premises as possible but is not affected by smoke or fumes*" without guidance on how that assessment should be made. With the benefit of hindsight, for multi-block fires, had Entry Control Point(s) been set up at suitable locations outside the affected buildings (as was done for the Siu Lek Yuen Fire Station Light Rescue Unit

assigned to respond to the same assistance request),[95] Fireman Ho's personal transmitter might have been activated in accordance with the entry control procedures, and his colleagues might then have been able to locate him.

(IV) Digitisation of the BA Log Records system

865. As mention in paragraph 857 above, the handwritten BA Log Records were incomplete on the day of the fire. Some Entry Control Officers erased previous entries and overwrote them with new entries after log sheets had been used up.

866. The inaccuracies in and the incompleteness of the BA Log Records are certainly unsatisfactory, even if no operational difficulty has been shown to have resulted in this case. Such records are essential for keeping track of firefighters at the scene of a fire and are important for reconstructing the sequence of operations afterwards. It is therefore welcome that (as DO Tung confirmed in his evidence) the FSD is implementing electronic entry control logs to overcome the constraints in using hand-written forms on handheld whiteboard and reduce the risk of human error in the future.

B3. Equipment to locate fireman in distress

867. According to the evidence of DO Tung , even if the red magnetic key of the personal transmitter of Fireman Ho's breathing apparatus set had been removed, it could not have helped the ERTs locate Fireman Ho on 30/F of Wang Tai House (Block E) because of the following technical limitations of the devices:

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95 See para 860 above.

(i) For FLS, signal transmission was limited to a vertical distance of about 23 floors. The distance might be further reduced due to the physical layout of the building. As Fireman Ho was on 30/F or 31/F of Wang Tai House (Block E) at the relevant time, it was unlikely that the handheld receiver would have been able to receive the transmission.

(ii) Even if the SCOUT had been activated, it would only have emitted a flash and sound signal of not less than 90 dB. Given that Fireman Ho's SCOUT was located on 30/F or 31/F of Wang Tai House (Block E), the nearest crews on the ground level would not have been able to hear the signal and locate him.

868. The Committee acknowledges the technical limitations of these devices which are only some of the tools available to support the search operations. They could not have saved Fireman Ho's life given the most difficult circumstances facing him on 30/F and 31/F of Wang Tai House (Block E) at the relevant time. In any event, better procedures for setting up the Entry Control Points may increase the chance of survival for firefighters in the future, and the FSD should keep up with the development of technology and continue to explore whether there are more advanced devices that may assist SAR operations in fire scenes. The Committee also welcome the initiative taken by the FSD in testing the next-generation FLS that addresses some of the technical limitations.

C. CONCLUSION

869. The Committee is satisfied that Fireman Ho had been provided with the appropriate PPE and breathing apparatus for the execution of his duty on the day of the fire. However, the FSD should continue to

explore if there can be any improvements in these appliances. The Committee is also pleased to note that: (i) the new Interspiro breathing apparatus system has been in service since January 2026; and (ii) even before the WF Court fire, the FSD has been in the process of procuring the new FLS system using dual-frequency signals. Further, the FSD should further review the operational procedures of firemen entering a fire scene as mentioned above.

870. Fireman Ho died in the most unfortunate circumstances. Having reviewed all the circumstances surrounding the incident, the Committee agrees with the IFITF that Fireman Ho had demonstrated exceptional bravery and a deep sense of duty while responding to the incident. Despite the challenging and life-threatening conditions, he prioritised the rescue of others over his own life, exemplifying the highest standards of selflessness and dedication. The same can be said about all other firefighters who carried out the firefighting and rescue operations in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. They deserve the greatest respect and gratitude from the people of Hong Kong.

CHAPTER 9
REGULATORY REGIMES RELEVANT TO THE FIRE SAFETY OF BUILDING MAINTENANCE AND RENOVATION WORKS

871. In this Chapter, the Committee will examine the regulatory regimes under the different Government departments and public body which are relevant to the fire safety of BMR works. These Government departments include the FSD, the BD, the ICU, and the LD. These regulatory regimes will be relevant to the issues that the Committee has to examine under the TOR1 Inquiry.

A. THE FSD

872. The FSD is led by the DFS with the support from the DD(Ops) and the Deputy Director (Public Safety and Corporate Strategy) ("DD(P&C)"). The DD(Ops) oversees the four Operational Commands, the Operational Support and Professional Development Command and the Ambulance Command; whereas the DD(P&C) oversees the Corporate Strategy Command, the Fire Safety Command, the Licensing and Certification Command ("L&C Command") and the Administration Branch. The senior management comprises 22 directorate officers[96], including 21 uniformed officers and one civilian officer.

96 Including the DFS and the two DDs.

A1. Responsibility over Active Fire Safety Provisions and Concurrent Responsibility over Passive Fire Safety Provisions

873. Section 7 of the Fire Services Ordinance (Cap. 95) ("FSO") provides:

> *"The duties of the [FSD] are to—*
>
> *(a) extinguish fires;*
>
> *(b) protect life and property in case of fire or other calamity;*
>
> *(c) give advice on fire protection measures and fire hazards as occasion requires;*
>
> *... ... ..."*

874. "Fire hazard" has been defined in Section 2 of the FSO to include "*any other matter or circumstance which materially increases the likelihood of fire or other calamity or the danger to life or property that would result from the outbreak of fire or the occurrence of any other calamity, or which would materially hamper the FSD in the discharge of its duties in the event of fire or other calamity*".

875. Section 8(1)(c) of the FSO empowers the DFS to enter any premises at all reasonable times to ascertain whether a fire hazard exists. On the other hand, Section 9 of the FSO empowers the DFS to, if satisfied of the existence in or on any premises of any fire hazard, serve a Fire Hazard Abatement Notice ("FHAN") on a person requiring the person to do such

things as may be specified by the DFS to abate the fire hazard within the period specified in the FHAN. Regulation 4 of the Fire Services (Fire Hazard Abatement) Regulation (Cap. 95F) ("FS(FHA)R") further enables the DFS to carry out works necessary to abate it.

876. As provided for in the "Code of Practice for Fire Safety in Buildings 2011" (2024 Edition) issued by the BD ("BD Fire Safety Code"), fire safety in buildings can be divided into two main categories: "active fire safety provisions" and "passive fire safety provisions". According to the FSD, it is responsible for the supervision of "active fire safety provisions" in buildings.

877. Active fire safety provisions refer to FSIs that operate during a fire. For instance, a fire detection system and FAS which identifies a fire at an early stage and alert occupants to evacuate promptly, a sprinkler system which activates automatically to suppress flames and limit their spread, and a fire hydrant and hose reel system which provides essential means for extinguishing fires. The FSD is responsible for regulating FSIs which fall under active fire safety provisions.

878. On the other hand, the BD is mainly responsible for the passive fire safety provisions in buildings. Passive fire safety provisions are embedded in the design and construction of the building itself. They prevent the spread of fire and smoke, maintain structural stability, and ensure sufficient means for occupants to evacuate while enabling fire personnel to carry out rescue and firefighting operations. Examples include fire-rated partitions and fire doors, which must provide adequate resistance to minimise the spread of fire and smoke; structural components that require certified fire resistance ratings to preserve integrity during fire incidents; and escape routes which must be designed with sufficient width and protective measures to allow safe evacuation.

879. The passive safety provisions are mainly regulated under the BO. According to the FSD, if an issue of passive safety provision touches on matters such as methods of carrying out certain construction and BMR works in buildings or the standards of the materials to be used in such works, it would be more desirable for the BD to deal with it and the related complaints. The reason offered by the FSD is that their staff may not have the expertise to deal with the related issues. Hence, at the working level, there is a general division of work between the two departments: the FSD is responsible for enforcing the fire safety provisions under the FSO; whilst the BD is responsible for enforcing the fire safety provisions under the BO.

880. For the various work procedures and building materials identified as responsible for the rapid spread of the fire, i.e. the erection of non-fire-resistant access doors and the use of foam boards and scaffolding protective nets with no fire-retardant properties, the FSD took the view they mainly fell within the purview of the BD. All these relate to works procedures and the use of building materials. As the BD would have the relevant expertise, the FSD should not handle the complaints relating to these matters and the same would be referred to the BD for handling.

881. On the other hand, the complaints and enforcement action relating to smoking by workers in BMR works sites would fall within the purview of the LD.

882. Despite that there is a division of work at the working level, the FSD agrees that it has the concurrent duty to deal with an issue or complaint relating to passive safety provisions, when the matter raised in the issue or complaint would increase the fire hazard in buildings in general.

883. This is in line with the decision of the Court of First Instance in the case of *U Storage Group Limited v Director of Fire Services & Another*[97]. That case related to the legality of the enforcement actions taken by the DFS after the No 4 alarm fire in the Amoycan Industrial Centre, Ngau Tau Kok Road, Kowloon Bay ("Amoycan Fire") in 2016, during which two firemen died in the course of carrying out their duties.

884. After the Amoycan Fire, the FSD issued the FHANs to the operators of various mini-storage facilities requiring them to comply with the fire abatement requirements stated in the notices. One of such operators took out a judicial review application challenging the legality of the FHANs. According to the applicant, the statutory powers of the DFS in relation to fire safety in buildings are limited to matters concerning FSIs, whereas the Director of Buildings ("DB") has exclusive power to prescribe and enforce fire safety regulations relating to the planning, design and construction of buildings. Thus, the powers to prescribe and enforce fire safety standards and regulations in relation to building works (whether structural or otherwise) are vested exclusively in the DB and not the DFS.

885. At that time, the DFS defended the legality of the enforcement actions by arguing that he had a concurrent jurisdiction to deal with the matters raised in the FHANs.

886. Mr Justice Wilson Chan agreed. The judge said the following in the judgement:

> *"47. The object of empowering the [DFS] to issue FHANs and introducing the definition of "fire hazards" in section 2 of the FSO is to "ensure, so far as is possible, that fires, which*

97 [2020] HKCFI 2114 (court cases would be cited by reference to the neutral citation number of the case or the legal reference in in the relevant law reports).

can be prevented by ordinary precautions, are prevented, and, secondly, that the damage likely to life and property when fire of other calamity does occur is minimized": see "Objects and Reasons" of the Fire Services (Amendment) Bill 1963, Official Report of Proceedings 4 December 1963. Hence, section 2 of the FSO is deliberately couched in wide terms to cater for fire hazards which may arise from different and constantly evolving circumstances, ranging from the layout and structure of a premises to floating obstructions (for example, unused boxes or rubbish) being placed in the means of escape of the premises which may materially increase the likelihood of fire or obstruct fire-fighting operations. The [DFS] was therefore given the power to use his expertise to identify fire hazards and request the responsible person to abate them. The suggestion that a fire hazard can only be identified after a fire engineering assessment is clearly unsustainable.

... ...

52. The FSO, the FS (FHA)R and the Other Legislations do not contain anything which suggests that fire safety regulations touching upon building works or anything beyond [FSI] are within the exclusive purview of the DB [meaning Director of Buildings]. The fact that a matter covered by the FSO may also be regulated by the BD or another authority from other perspectives does not prevent the [DFS] from exercising its powers under the FSO from the perspective of fire safety.

From a fire safety perspective, the BD simply does not possess the requisite expertise to determine, for example, what would "materially hamper the FSD in the discharge of its duties in the event of fire" or other forms of fire hazards.

… … …

57. … … … While it is true that that the DB has a role to play in fire safety in buildings as provided for in the Other Legislations, it does not follow that the [DFS] need not concern itself with the same subject matter, particularly when the [DFS's] statutory role is to, inter alia, protect life and property in case of fire or other calamity and give advice on fire protection measures and fire hazards as occasion requires: see section 7 of the FSO."

887. As submitted by the DFS to the court in that case, the DFS is the statutory body having the expertise in extinguishing fires and giving advice on fire protection measures and fire hazards, and the DFS is exclusively tasked under the FSO and the FS(FHA)R to apply its expert knowledge to devise appropriate fire abatement measures.

888. In the Inquiry, the DFS does not dispute the observations made by Mr Justice Wilson Chan and the DFS's own stance as taken in the case of *U Storage Group Limited*.

889. The Committee also notes that the Government had expressly acknowledged the importance of good co-ordination between the FSD and the BD (and indeed other departments) when the relevant legislations were introduced before the then Legislative Council. The judge said the following in the judgement:

> *"54. The complementary nature of FSD's power and the power of other departments (for example, [LD] and BD) in dealing with fire safety issues has long been recognised, and is generally considered to be desirable by the Administration and the Legislature as the powers often serve different purposes:*
>
> *(1) In a reply to the oral question raised by members of the Legislative Council on 18 August 1971 with respect to enforcement actions in factories, the then Commissioner of Labour Mr R.M. Hetherington noted that the power of the FSD (by issuing FHANs) and the power of the [LD] in relation to fire hazards serves different purposes. Mr Hetherington stated "Independently, the [DFS] is empowered, under the [FSO] and the Dangerous Goods Ordinance, to take action to abate fire hazards in respect of any premises and such action can be taken and is taken by him against factories. In the ordinary way, officers of the [LD] and the [FSD] keep each other informed of action taken. That there are two separate enforcing agencies keeping an eye on the constantly changing conditions*

in factories in domestic and commercial buildings is welcomed by me. Clearly, co-ordination of the work of the [FSD], which is primarily interested in the overall risks in a particular building, and the work of the [LD], which is mainly concerned with the protection from fire hazards of the employees of a factory and, additionally of other persons who may be affected by the operators of the factory, is desirable";

... ..."

890. The interplay between the FSD and the BD can also be found in the following specific statutory provisions. Under Section 16(1)(b)(ii) of the BO, buildings must be provided with the minimum FSIs necessary for their intended purposes. Further, under Section 21(6)(d), the BD will not issue an occupation permit unless the DFS certifies that those required FSIs shown on the vetted building plans have been properly installed and are up to the required standard.

A2. Regulatory Regime governing RFSICs

891. The FSD supervises the installation and maintenance of FSIs mainly through RFSICs.

892. The Fire Service (Installation Contractors) Regulations (Cap. 95A) ("FS(IC)R") and the Fire Service (Installations and Equipment) Regulations (Cap. 95B) ("FS(I&E)R") made under Sections 25(1)(g) and 25(1)(h) of the FSO empower the DFS to regulate the conduct of RFSICs and the control of the installation, repair, maintenance and inspection of FSIs. Under Regulation 8 of the FS(I&E)R, the owner (which includes the

occupier) of FSIs has a legal responsibility to keep the FSIs in efficient working order at all times.

893. Regulations 6 and 7 of the FS(I&E)R stipulate that only an RFSIC shall install, maintain, inspect, or repair any FSIs that are required by or pursuant to law to be installed.

894. Under the classification system stipulated in Regulation 4 of the FS(IC)R, three classes of RFSICs are designated depending on the types of FSIs to be installed, maintained, inspected or repaired. Regulation 4 of the FS(IC)R provides for the minimum qualifications for registration of each class of RFSICs. For example, for registration as a Class 1 RFSIC, the applicant or at least one of the applicant's directors, employees or partners holds a degree in electrical engineering satisfying the examination requirements (Parts I and II) of the Council of Engineering Institutions for corporate membership of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, and the applicant or at least one of the applicant's directors, employees or partners: (i) is the manufacturer or designer of an electrical circuit or other apparatus, recognised by the DFS, for the detection by alarm or otherwise of smoke or fire; or (ii) is an authorised agent for a manufacturer of such type of apparatus.

895. There are about 1,000 RFSICs in Hong Kong.

896. The RFSICs would have to submit the relevant statutory certificates commonly known as "FS251", to certify the installation, maintenance, repairs or inspections of FSIs. Under Regulation 9 of the FS(I&E)R, where an RFSIC installs, maintains, repairs or inspects any FSI, it shall within 14 days of completion of the work issue a FS251 certificate and forward a copy to the FSD. The FSD will monitor the performance of RFSICs, and disciplinary proceedings may be taken against RFSICs which

violate the relevant fire safety regulations. The FSD also operates a "Demerit Points System" ("Demerit System") for RFSICs.

897. To regulate the work of the RFSICs, the FSD also publishes the Code of Practice for Minimum Fire Service Installations and Equipment and the Code of Practice for Inspection, Testing and Maintenance of Installations and Equipment. While the former specifies the required FSIs for different types of buildings and premises, the latter categorises inspections and tests, and provides guidance on how to conduct these inspections and tests. The FSD also issues circular letters to provide updates on fire safety requirements and procedures so as to enhance fire safety.

898. There are about 60,000 buildings in Hong Kong which require annual inspection of FSIs. The Licensing & Certification Command ("L&C Command") has to handle about 300,000 forms (including FS251s) filed with the FSD each year. Of the 300,000 forms received, 15,000 would be selected for document review. There is a checklist which is required to be completed by the RFSICs for the annual inspections. About 300 checklists would be selected annually for document checking.

899. Apart from document reviews, the L&C Command would conduct verification inspections to verify the accuracy of the contents in FS251s and functional tests.

900. For verification inspections, they cover complaint cases (about 3,000 annually), damaged items stated in FS251s (about 2,000 cases annually), and RFSICs with more demerit points according to the Demerit System (about 1,000 cases annually). The inspections would be surprise inspections.

901. For functional tests, they cover mis-activation of fire alarms (about 1,000 cases annually) and RFSICs with more demerit points according to the Demerit System (about 80 cases annually). Notifications to the owners of the FSI and the relevant RFSIC may have to be given in the case of functional tests, as such tests may cause inconvenience to the occupants resulting from the noise of the fire alarms or spraying of water from the sprinkler systems.

902. About 95% of FS251s are filed in physical form and not electronically. It requires human resources to input the data on the physical form into the computer system known as the Integrated Licensing, Fire Safety and Prosecution System ("LIFIPS"). There may be a time lag of a few months for input of such data. Further, such work system would make it difficult for the FSD to police any late or improper filing of FS251s.

A3. Responsibility of the Homeowners and the IO under the Regulatory Regime

903. The FSI regulatory regime also covers the homeowners and the IOs as the owners of FSIs have the ultimate responsibility to ensure that FSIs are in efficient working order at all times. According to Regulation 8 of the FS(I&E)R, the owner must have such installations or equipment inspected by an RFSIC at least once every 12 months. The FSD monitors this responsibility by checking the status of building FSIs via: (i) audits, such as vetting FS251s submitted to the FSD and functional tests; and (ii) visits and inspections, such as handling complaints and defective FSIs.

904. Though homeowners or the IOs normally hand over the day-to-day management of the FSIs to a property management company, the existing regulatory regime does not impose a separate liability on the part of the PMC for proper maintenance of the FSIs in buildings.

A4. Shutdown of FSIs during BMR works

905. The RFSICs engaged as part of the Works, China Status, had issued various SDNs to the FSD for the shutdown of the FHHRSs for the carrying out of the repair and renovation works in the roof fire tanks of all eight buildings in WF Court. In shutting down the booster pumps for the FHHRSs, the staff of ISS turned off the master power switches in the booster pump rooms, with the effect of deactivating the FASs of all eight buildings at the same time. For such reason, it is necessary to set out the regulatory regime governing the shutdown of FSIs.

906. In accordance with the FSD Circular Letter No. 1/2021 - Shutdown of Fire Service Installations for Maintenance, Inspection, Modification or Repair ("FS 2021 Shutdown Circular"), a set of procedures for handling shutdown of FSIs must be observed by RFSICs when any major FSIs need to be shut down for maintenance, inspection, modification or repair. The FS 2021 Shutdown Circular provides, amongst other things:

(i) When an RFSIC is employed to maintain, inspect, modify or repair FSIs of which the works are expected to be carried out overnight or for more than 24 hours continuously, the RFSIC should notify the FSD of the defects as soon as possible within 24 hours after the defects are identified. FSIs cover nine types of systems including the FHHRS and the FAS[98].

(ii) The written notification to the FSD shall be given using the specified form, i.e. the SDN.

98 The remaining major FSI systems are (a) sprinkler system, (b) street fire hydrant system, (c) water spray system, (d) smoke extraction system, (e) staircase pressurization system, (f) dry riser system and (g) fire detection system of premises with sleeping risk.

(iii) Disruption to the normal operation of the FSI caused by its shutdown should be kept to the minimum. A systematic approach should be adopted in carrying out the works, and the affected FSI should be shut down by sections and be resumed normal as soon as practicable.

(iv) If extension of FSI shutdown period is required, the RFSIC should submit a written notification of extension in the prescribed form to the FSD before the previously scheduled date of completion.

(v) The written notification shall only be completed and signed by the Qualified Person ("QP") or the AS of the RFSIC. The QP or the AS of RFSIC should critically review the need for extension of FSI shutdown and personally confirm such need or resumption of FSI via the written notification.

(vi) In addition to the said notification mechanism set out in the aforesaid paragraphs, the relevant guidelines should also be observed by the RFSIC concerned when a FSI is expected to be shut down overnight or for more than 24 hours continuously, including the notification of the shutdown to the residents and the PMC and the posting of SDNs at prominent locations. Further, shutting down the whole system for a prolonged period should be avoided and the affected FSI system should be resumed as early as possible.

(vii) Failure to follow the procedures of notification to the DFS as stipulated in the FS 2021 Shutdown Circular, or any undue, arbitrary or deliberate delay of FSI works, may amount to "improper conduct or negligence" in the maintenance or

repair of FSI, rendering the RFSIC concerned unfit to be on the register.

907. Upon receiving the SDN, personnel from the local fire station will visit the subject building within 24 hours to conduct a risk assessment.

908. Based on the risk assessment results, the FSD will issue an Advisory Letter to the FSI owners, urging them to complete repairs as early as possible and requiring them to notify the occupants of the non-operation of the FSI concerned. The Advisory Letter may also require the owners to adopt additional fire safety measures within 72 hours, such as providing sufficient portable fire extinguishers or enhancing patrols (e.g. by implementing 24-hour manned fire patrols). Re-inspection would be conducted by the frontline officers of the relevant local fire station 72 hours after the issuance of the Advisory Letter to check whether the standby means have been properly provided. Further enforcement actions may be taken by the FSD for non-provision of the standby means. The FSD will monitor the progress of the repair works of FSIs.

909. If the period of the shutdown exceeds 60 days, the supervision would pass from the local fire station to the L&C Command for continuous monitoring. According to AD Keung, AD responsible for the L&C Command, maintenance works for fire service water tanks in buildings would take some time to complete. The main concern of the L&C Command is that there would be continuous execution of the maintenance works by the contractors and continuous supervision of the shutdown by RFSIC. Unless the extension relating to such kind of works exceeds one year, the L&C Command would not take any follow-up action.

910. According to the FSD, unless the extension notification is not properly submitted, no further visit or inspection would be conducted. As the FSIs have already been shut down and the RFSIC should have commenced the required maintenance or repair works, the situation is not expected to deteriorate further during the extended shutdown period. Hence, no additional visit or inspection is considered necessary, and it remains the responsibility of the RFSIC to report completion once the repair and maintenance works have been finished.

B. THE BD

911. The BD is the main department responsible for the regulatory oversight of construction works relating to buildings in Hong Kong, whether they are newly-built buildings or buildings under maintenance and renovation. The construction works are usually carried out by third party building contractors, and there is a regulatory regime under the BO for the supervision of such works carried out by these contractors. The supervision also varies according to the nature, scale, complexity and risk levels of the buildings works. For example, for more complex and higher risk building works, approval and consent must be sought from the BA before the commencement of works. On the other hand, for less complex and lower risk building works, the simplified procedures of the Minor Works Control System ("MWCS") would apply.

912. The regulatory regime involves a three-tier control system and different building works control systems.

B1. Three-tier control system

913. There is a three-tier control system under the BO comprising the BA, Prescribed Building Professionals ("PBPs") and RCs. According

to the BD, joint performance of all three parties is required to serve the objectives of the BO, and to ensure effective operation of the building control regime as well as the safety and quality of building works in accordance with the BO and its subsidiary regulations. In other words, the effectiveness and success of the regime depend very much on the proper discharge of the duties by these parties.

914. The first tier of the control system is the BA. BA has been defined in the BO to mean the DB who is the head of the BD[99]. The policy bureau responsible for overseeing the operation of the BD is the DEVB.

915. As the regulator and enforcer of the BO, the BA is responsible for setting the standards and requirements; approving statutory submissions; performing the function of "check the checker" through site inspections and audit checks; overseeing the performance of PBPs and RCs; and taking enforcement actions against non-compliance. More specifically, its major roles, functions and duties include:

(i) to administer the registration system for PBPs and RCs;

(ii) to review, set and enforce safety, health and environmental standards set out in the BO and its subsidiary regulations;

(iii) for new buildings, alteration and addition ("A&A") and demolition works, to scrutinise, grant approval of plans and consent for commencement of works proposed by PBPs; issue occupation permits for completed buildings; acknowledge completion of works;

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99 Under the BO, the DB may authorise other officers to take up the duties and responsibilities on behalf of the BA. This is why the BA for the Works at WF Court was officers of the ICU. See Section C below.

(iv) to implement the MWCS to facilitate owners in carrying out small-scale building works safely and lawfully;

(v) to implement the MBIS and Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme ("MWIS");

(vi) to conduct inspections and audit checks of building works sites to ensure building safety and quality of works;

(vii) to oversee the performance of PBPs and RCs and take disciplinary actions against misconduct or negligence of PBPs and RCs;

(viii) to attend to public reports concerning safety and irregularities of building works;

(ix) to take enforcement action against irregularities in building works and against building defects, dangerous buildings and unauthorised building works;

(x) to take prosecution actions against non-compliance with the BO; and

(xi) to review renewal of registration of PBPs and RCs for substandard performance.

916. The duties and powers of the BA under the BO may be carried out and exercised by officers of the BD or other departments specified in Schedule 4 of the BO as authorised by the DB.

917. The second tier of the control system is the PBPs which include APs, RSEs, Registered Geotechnical Engineers ("RGEs") and RIs under Section 2 of the BO. They are building professionals generally required for new building developments, demolition, A&A works, works carried out under the MBIS, and Minor Works (Class I only)[100].

918. The duties of the PBPs under the second tier are mainly to ensure that the building works under their supervision are carried out safely in accordance with the provisions in the BO and its subsidiary legislations. Since the Works at WF Court were carried out pursuant to the SNs issued under the MBIS, an RI was required to be appointed to supervise the execution of the Works. More details about the duties of the RI under the MBIS will be set out in sub-section B4 below.

919. The PBPs are required to possess the relevant qualifications and experience and to pass the interview of the respective registration committees set up by virtue of the BO before the BA would consider accepting them to be registered under the BO.

920. There are different qualification and practical experience requirements for the different PBPs. Upon formulating the policy on the MBIS in 2009, it was recognised that building inspection and repair works conducted under the MBIS should be relatively simple as compared with new building construction, demolition and A&A works. To allow more choices for homeowners and enhance market competition, the pool of service providers for building inspections and building works supervision, i.e. the works performed by the RI, was intentionally expanded from the AP and RSE to other professionals.

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100 The details of the different classes of MW will be set out in the next sub-section of this Chapter on the building works control system.

921. Under Regulation 3 of the Building (Administration) Regulations (Cap. 123A) ("B(A)R"), the following qualifications are required for registration as an RI:

(i) an AP;

(ii) an RSE;

(iii) a Registered Architect ("RA");

(iv) a Registered Professional Engineer ("RPE") in building, structural, civil, building services (building), or materials (building) engineering discipline; or

(v) a Registered Professional Surveyor ("RPS") in building surveying or quantity surveying division.

922. Under Regulation 3 of the B(A)R, the following practical experience is required for registration as an RI:

(i) for AP or RSE, having appropriate practical experience in Hong Kong on building repair and maintenance projects within the seven years preceding the application;

(ii) for RA or RPE (in building or structural engineering disciplines) or RPS (in building surveying), having a minimum of one year of practical experience in building construction, repair and maintenance in Hong Kong within three years prior to the application, as considered appropriate by the Inspectors Registration Committee ("IRC"); and

(iii) for RPE (in civil, building services (building), or materials (building) engineering) or RPS (in quantity surveying), having a minimum of three years of practical experience in building construction, repair and maintenance in Hong Kong, with at least one year within the three years preceding the application, as deemed appropriate by the IRC.

923. The third tier of the control system is the RCs which include RGBCs, Registered Specialist Contractors ("RSCs") and RMWCs. In general, they are responsible for carrying out the building works properly and safely in accordance with the statutory provisions in the BO and its subsidiary legislations, the details of which will be addressed in sub-section B4 in this Chapter below.

924. RCs, who may be a body corporate, a partnership or a sole proprietorship, are required to possess the relevant qualifications, experience and competence, having proper management structure and access to plant and resources (in the case of a body corporate), and should pass the interviews conducted by the relevant registration committees constituted under the BO before the BA would consider accepting them to be registered under the BO.

925. Under Section 8A of the BO, there are three contractors' registers, namely the RGBC register, the RSC register and the RMWC register, being kept by the BA.

926. Applicants for inclusion in the register of RGBC or RSC are required to submit the required documents to the BA for consideration. The BD will check whether the documents submitted are in order or not. Applicants are required to attend an interview conducted by the Contractors Registration Committee ("CRC"). The CRC performs its function by examining the qualifications and experience of the applicants; conducting

interviews with the key personnel of applicants (i.e. the AS and technical director ("TD")); and advising the BA to accept, defer or reject the applications for inclusion in the register. The BA will accept the application only if so recommended by the CRC. Upon payment by the applicant of the prescribed fee for registration, the BA will enter the applicant's name in the RGBC or RSC register, publish it in the Gazette and issue a certificate of registration. Otherwise, the BA may refuse or defer the applications.

927. Applicants for inclusion in the register of RMWCs may apply for registration in respect of the relevant class, type or item of minor works and may choose to register as RMWC (Individual) or RMWC (Company). They are also required to submit the required documents to the BA for consideration. The details of the different classes, types and items of MW will be set out in the next section of this Chapter on the building works control system.

928. Applicants for RMWC (Individual) may apply for registration for one or more Class III MW items. The BA will examine the qualifications and experience of the applicants. If the BA accepts the application, upon payment by the applicant of the prescribed fee for registration, the BA will enter the applicant's name in the RMWC (Individual) register, publish it in the Gazette, and issue a certificate of registration. Otherwise, the BA may refuse or defer the applications.

929. For Class II and Class III RMWC (Company), the BA would assess the suitability of the applicant. If the BA accepts the application, upon payment by the applicant of the prescribed fee for registration, the BA will enter the applicant's name in the Class II or III RMWC (Company) register, publish it in the Gazette, and issue a certificate of registration. Otherwise, the BA may refuse or defer the applications.

930. For Class I RMWC (Company), applicants are required to attend an interview conducted by the Minor Works Contractors Registration Committees ("MWCRCs"). A MWCRC performs its function by examining the qualifications and experience of the applicants, conducting interview with the AS and advising the BA to accept, defer or reject applications for inclusion in the register. The BA will accept the applicant only if so recommended by a MWCRC. Upon payment by the applicant of the prescribed fee for registration, the BA will enter the applicant's name in the Class I RMWC (Company) register, publish it in the Gazette and issue a certificate of registration. Otherwise, the BA may refuse or defer the applications. For registration as an RMWC (Individual) and RMWC (Company), the applicant must satisfy the BA of the various requirements set out in Regulations 11(2) and 12(5) of the Building (Minor Works) Regulation (Cap. 123N) ("B(MW)R") respectively.

931. According to the BD's records, the numbers of RIs and RCs including RGBCs and RMWCs that may carry out prescribed inspections and repair respectively under the MBIS in recent years are tabulated as follows:

	31.12.2021	**31.12.2022**	**31.12.2023**	**31.12.2024**	**31.12.2025**
RI	585	584	590	614	632
RGBC	780	810	828	810	827
RMWC (Company)	10,196	10,001	9,913	9,286	8,958
RMWC (Individual)	7,972	7,930	7,319	7,306	7,369

932. As repeatedly emphasised by the BD, performance of all three parties is required to serve the objectives of the BO, and to ensure

effective operation of the building control regime as well as the safety and quality of building works in accordance with the BO and its subsidiary regulations. In this connection, the PBPs serve as overall coordinators and are responsible for the building design and periodic supervision of the carrying out of building works to ensure compliance with the BO. The RCs actually carry out the building works and hence they assume the responsibility of continuous supervision of the works to ensure compliance with the BO. Both PBPs and RCs have to certify, upon the completion of building works under Regulation 25 of the B(A)R, that the works are completed in accordance with the provisions of the BO and its subsidiary regulations.

933. As mentioned above, statutory requirements are set to govern the qualification, experience, ability and competence of PBPs and RCs. The primary aim of the registration system is to ensure that only competent professionals and contractors can take up the roles, duties and obligations to prepare plans, supervise, carry out and certify building works in accordance with the BO. Renewal of registration of PBPs and RCs will be reviewed if non-performance is identified.

B2. Building Works Control System

934. Apart from the three-tier control system, the regulatory regime also consists of the building works control system.

935. Based on the different nature, scale, complexity and risk levels of building works, different mechanisms and procedures of control are administered to ensure the safety and quality of the works. Complicated and high-risk works require the participation of more qualified professionals according to the registration system mentioned in the preceding section.

936. For new buildings, A&A and demolition works which are considered more extensive, complex and of higher risk, an AP or RSE or RGE is required to prepare and submit plans to the BD for prior approval and obtain the BA's consent before commencement of works.

937. In addition to the execution, supervision and certification of the works by the RGBC/RSC, an AP/RSE/RGE is also required to supervise and certify the works in accordance with the BO.

938. Upon completion of a new building, the AP/RSE/RGEs and the RGBC/RSCs should separately certify completion of the building in compliance with the provisions of the BO and in accordance with the approved plans and that the building is structurally safe. In discharging the "check the checker" function as the regulatory authority, the BD will conduct on-site inspections to audit check the works against the approved plans and the BO requirements, and vet the relevant test reports, certificates and documents. If the BD finds the building is completed to its satisfaction in accordance with the BO, an occupation permit will be issued.

939. For MW that are relatively smaller in scale, less complex and of lower risk, including repair of external walls, roofs and drainage pipes, the works may follow the simplified procedures under the statutory MWCS introduced in 2010[101] without the need to obtain prior approval of plans or consent for commencement of works from the BD. Since the implementation of the MWCS, the number of MW submissions has increased from about 35,000 to about 150,000 each year. The number of RMWC (who may be a body corporate, a partnership or a sole proprietorship)[102] is over 16,000.

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101 Launched through the enactment of the Buildings (Amendment) Bill 2007 in 2008.

102 While the RMWCs can carry out the MW items (with respect to class, type or item) for which they are registered, the RGBCs are eligible to carry out all MW items.

940. There are currently 187 MW items. The works are classified into three classes, namely Classes I, II and III, depending on the scale, complexity and risk level:

(i) Class I (currently 58 items):

Class I covers more complicated MW such as repair of roof finishes, repair of concrete projections, and removal of large-size unauthorised rooftop structures. The works have to be designed and supervised by a PBP and carried out by an RC. The PBP and RC should submit notifications, plans and documents to the BD before commencement and after completion of works.

(ii) Class II (currently 68 items):

Class II covers MW of lower complexity and safety risk, such as laying or repair of external wall rendering or wall tiles, repair of load bearing walls, and erection of medium-size signboards on external walls. The works have to be carried out by an RC, who should submit notifications, plans and documents to the BD before commencement and after completion of works. No appointment of PBP is required for Class II MW.

(iii) Class III (currently 61 items):

Class III covers mainly common household MW of the lowest risk category, such as installation of supporting frames for air-conditioner units, drying racks and canopies. The works have to be carried out by an RC who should submit notifications, plans or descriptions of works and documents to the BD after completion of works. No appointment of PBP is required for Class III MW.

941. Before the introduction of the MWCS in 2010, there was no clear avenue under the BO for the Government to administer control over building repair works carried out by homeowners, such as external wall repairs or drainage repairs. Plans of repair works were not prescribed plans under Regulation 8 of the B(A)R and hence were not submitted to the BA, nor would the Government know if the repair works were carried out or supervised by an RC. The introduction of the MWCS has put repair works under lawful control through the simplified requirements of the MWCS, such that qualified PBPs and RCs have to submit notifications, plans and documents to the BD before commencement and after completion of repair works, carry out and supervise the works, and certify completion of the works in accordance with the BO.

942. In the case of WF Court, the Works fell into MW Classes I and II. Since the ICU was responsible for the regulatory oversight of these works for the reasons given below at sub-section C1, further details about the supervision of these works will be set out in a later part of this Chapter on the regulatory regime under the ICU.

B3. Role of the BD in the administration of the MBIS

943. The MBIS regime was introduced under the BO to address the long-standing problem of building maintenance neglect and to ensure building safety in the long run. Generally, the MBIS applies to private buildings aged 30 years or above except domestic buildings not exceeding three storeys in height. The consultation for the establishment of such a scheme began in the early 2000s, and the MBIS was finally introduced in 2012, which was after the introduction of the MWCS in 2010. Under the MBIS, owners, upon receipt of the SN, will have to conduct inspections of the building and to carry out the necessary repair works.

944. For eligible homeowners or IOs who are willing to carry out building maintenance properly, the Government will provide financial and technical support to assist them in carrying out inspection and repair works voluntarily or in compliance with the SNs under the MBIS. The Government has since 2018 introduced a number of subsidy schemes in partnership with the URA with a total financial commitment of HK$19 billion, including the Operation Building Bright 2.0 Scheme ("OBB 2.0 Scheme") (with a funding of HK$6 billion) to support eligible owners to carry out inspection and repair works for the common parts of the buildings under the MBIS.

945. The BD will take enforcement actions against non-compliance with the SNs and instigate prosecution if owners fail to comply with the SNs without reasonable excuse.

946. Under the MBIS, the BD is empowered under Section 30B of the BO to issue SNs to owners of private buildings aged 30 years or above (except domestic buildings not exceeding three storeys in height). According to the same statutory provision and paragraph 2 on page 1 of the Code of Practice for the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme and

Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme 2012 (2023 Edition) issued by the BD ("BD MBIS Code"), after being served with the SN, homeowners are required to appoint an RI to carry out inspection, and when prescribed repairs are required, appoint a RC (which may be a RGBC or a RMWC depending on the nature of works in question) to carry out any necessary rectification and repair works for their buildings under the supervision of an RI.

947. The building elements to be covered under the MBIS prescribed inspection include:

(i) external elements and other physical elements;

(ii) structural elements;

(iii) fire safety elements;

(iv) drainage system; and

(v) unauthorised building works in common parts of the building, on the exterior other than the common parts of the building (such as external wall, roof or podium, yard or slope adjoining the building) or on the street on which the building fronts or abuts.

948. Homeowners and OCs may appoint different RIs to carry out prescribed inspection and supervision of the execution of the prescribed repairs under the MBIS. If the RI who supervises the repair works is not the same person as for the building inspection, the previous RI appointed under Section 30D(1)(a) of the BO for the prescribed inspection must submit to the BA in the specified form certifying that the RI who carried out the

prescribed inspection is not a partner, director, or AS of the RC appointed to carry out the prescribed repair. Regardless of whether the RI who supervises the repair works is the same as the one who carries out prescribed inspection or not, the RI who supervises the repair works also must submit to the BA after completion of the repair works in the specified form certifying that the RI is not a partner, director, or AS of the RC appointed to carry out the prescribed repair under Regulation 13(2) of the Building (Inspection and Repair) Regulation (Cap. 123P) ("B(I&R)R").

949. In this Report, the RI responsible for carrying out the prescribed inspection is referred to as the "RI/Inspection", whereas the RI responsible for supervising the execution of the repair works is referred to as the "RI/Supervision". If the term "RI" is used, it just means an RI generally. In the case of WF Court, Will Power was both the "RI/Inspection" and "RI/Supervision" under the MBIS.

950. Most of the prescribed repairs carried out under the MBIS are MW or exempted building works under Section 41 of the BO, and so the repair proposal normally does not require the BA's approval or consent for commencement of works. Nevertheless, BMR works carried out under the MBIS have to comply with the regulatory regime of both the MBIS and the MWCS (or the more stringent building works control system if BMR works consist of more complex building works).

B4. Roles and duties of RI and RC in respect of repair works under the MBIS

951. The MBIS requires prescribed repairs to be carried out in accordance with the scope set out in the BD MBIS Code. The objective of this Code is to ensure the safety of the building during the execution of BMR works that are required to be done under the MBIS.

952. If rectification and repair works are required to be carried out after the prescribed inspection, the RI/Inspection shall demarcate in the repair proposal the part of the works that are either minor works to be commenced in accordance with the MWCS, or subject to the prior approval and consent system where the appointment of an AP or RSE is required (e.g. repair of underground drainage works that involve an excavation of depth more than that permitted under the MWCS, demolition of cantilevered slab canopy, etc.). Although an AP or RSE is appointed for such repair, the RI is still responsible for the coordination of the repair works and certifying the completion of the repair under the MBIS in accordance with the B(I&R)R.

953. In some circumstances, where the owners wish to take the opportunity to carry out other non-MBIS improvement or upgrading works concurrently (e.g. replacement of the finishes of the lobby, replacement of existing staircase doors with new doors), the repair works required under the MBIS should be clearly stated in the repair proposal and should be distinguished from the additional improvement or upgrading works. Such additional improvement or upgrading works, depending on nature, may be carried out under the MWCS or the approval and consent system.

954. The RIs appointed for the conduct of the prescribed inspection or the supervision of the execution of the prescribed repair shall submit the documents and certificates in the corresponding specified forms within specified time after completion of the prescribed inspection or the prescribed repair. Regulations 12(2)(a) and 13(2)(a) of the B(I&R)R specify the information to be included in the inspection report and completion report respectively. For the completion report, it should include record of repair works carried out, report or certificate of the material used, statement of the methods of the testing adopted for the prescribed repair and record of the result of the testing conducted.

955. For prescribed repairs under the MBIS, the existing regulatory regime is designed in such a way that the RIs and the RCs shall bear the basic responsibility of ensuring safety in the buildings and quality of the building works.

956. Under Section 30D(4) of the BO and Part 4 of the B(I&R)R, the RIs should ensure the building is safe or has been rendered safe and he or she complies generally with the provisions in the BO. Further, Part 2.1 of the BD MBIS Code expressly lists the major duties of the RI as follows:

(i) to carry out the building inspection personally;

(ii) to provide proper supervision of the necessary rectification and repair works with regard to the requirements of the MBIS;

(iii) to ensure the repair materials to be used are not defective and comply with the provisions of the BO;

(iv) to ensure the repair materials to be used have been mixed, prepared, applied, used, erected, constructed, placed or fixed in the manner required for such materials under the BO;

(v) to ensure the building for which he or she is appointed to supervise the repair is safe or has been rendered safe;

(vi) to notify the BA of any case of emergency in relation to building safety revealed during the course of building inspection or supervision of building repair works;

(vii) to notify the BA of any building works that have been or are being carried out in contravention of the provisions of the BO in the common parts of the building; on the exterior other than the common parts of the building, such as external wall, roof or podium, yard or slope adjoining the building; or on the street on which the building fronts or abuts, which are identified during the course of building inspection; and

(viii) to comply generally with the provisions in the BO.

957. To ensure the standard and quality of the repair works, the RI should exercise professional judgement in adopting the most appropriate repair methods based on the findings of the inspection and appropriate proof tests if necessary. According to paragraph 5.2 of the MBIS Code, in determining the repair methods, the RI shall consider different factors, among others, the impact of repair proposals to the occupants and the public and any other factors which are relevant to the safety and health standards of the building under repair.

958. To ensure the works are prepared, carried out and completed to the required standards, the RI shall examine and supervise all the rectification and repair works carried out by the RC at such frequency and extent not less than that specified in Appendix VI of the BD MBIS Code. According to this Appendix:

(i) The RI may appoint a Level 1 representative and a Level 2 representative to form a supervision team to supervise the rectification or repair works and proof tests on his or her behalf. The RI has the overall responsibility and accountability for the supervision team, and the representative is directly accountable to the RI.

(ii) There are minimum qualifications and experience required for Level 1 and Level 2 representatives: with Level 1 representative equivalent to a technically competent person ("TCP") of grade T1 for Buildings Works or Class I MW, as stipulated in the Code of Practice for Site Supervision; with Level 2 representative equivalent to a TCP of grade T3 for Building Works or Class I MW, as stipulated in the Code of Practice for Site Supervision, or who passed a specified top-up course with a minimum total relevant working experience of five years.

(iii) There is a minimum frequency of site inspection required: for RI, first inspection of rectification or repair works and proof tests that are specified for Level 2 Supervision; for Level 2 representative, fortnightly inspection; for Level 1 representative, weekly inspection.

(iv) The RI and the supervision team shall properly keep the checklists and inspection records for the supervision of the rectification or repair works.

959. For the RCs, under Sections 9, 9AA and 30F of the BO, they must ensure the part of the building for which the contractor is appointed to carry out the prescribed repair has been rendered safe. Further, Regulation 16(1) of the Building (Construction) Regulation (Cap. 123Q) ("B(C)R") requires that for the carrying out of buildings works, appropriate construction methods and procedures must be adopted and appropriate precautionary measures must be taken. In discharging these duties, the RCs should:

(i) maintain continuous supervision of the building works, ensuring that the building works are carried out in

accordance with approved plans and SPs (as may be required) and requirements under the BO and its subsidiary regulations;

(ii) arrange and conduct testing of building works and materials to ensure that they are safe;

(iii) take precautionary and protective measures for temporary works as required; and

(iv) notify the RIs (or other PBPs as the case requires) and the BA on irregularities detected and implementing rectifications as required.

960. The RI and the RC each have roles to play in ensuring the safety and the quality of the building works. Part 6 of the BD MBIS Code specifies that the supervision and control to be exercised by the RIs and the RCs during the course of rectification and repair works shall cover adequate measures to ensure a safe working environment and adequate control on the sequence of rectification and repair works, and the erection and maintenance of scaffolds. Specifically, the RIs and the RCs should fully understand the potential fire risks associated with the carrying out of the rectification and repair works and adopt appropriate precautionary measures accordingly.

961. Further, as stipulated in paragraph 6.1 of the BD MBIS Code, the RIs and the RCs should adopt the practices set out in the BD MBIS Code and make reference to the Practice Notes for Mandatory Building and Window Inspection Schemes ("PNBIs"), the PNAPs and the Practice Notes for Registered Contractors ("PNRCs") wherever appropriate.

B5. Control over passive fire safety provisions in buildings

962. Under the BO, the BD is also responsible for regulating passive fire safety provisions in buildings, covering the planning, design, construction and related works of buildings to ensure that passive fire safety provisions meet statutory standards. The BD oversees requirements stipulated under Regulation 35 of the B(C)R and Regulations 41, 41A, 41B, 41C, and 41D of the Building (Planning) Regulations (Cap. 123F) ("B(P)R"), which govern means of escape, fire-resisting construction, and means of access for firefighting and rescue in buildings. To implement these requirements, the BD Fire Safety Code was issued by the BD to provide guidance on compliance with the requirements laid down in the aforesaid regulations. It also provides guidelines on the testing standards for the fire properties of building elements and components, fire safety management of buildings and the alternative approach in fire safety design.

963. To ensure compliance with the performance requirements under the B(C)R, the BD:

(i) issues various codes of practice in respect of structural design and building materials commonly used in building construction covering, e.g. concrete, glass and steel;

(ii) provides the deemed-to-comply provisions on fire resisting construction and fire properties of building elements and components in Parts C and E of the BD Fire Safety Code respectively for compliance with the relevant requirements of the B(C)R; and

(iii) issues technical guidelines, practice notes and circular letters to provide standards and technical criteria accepted by the BA as compliant with the performance requirements stipulated in the B(C)R. For instance, the PNAP APP-53 provides a list of standards and technical criteria accepted by the BA.

964. For these reasons, removing fire-rated staircase windows to create worker access openings in the escape staircases would be a matter falling within the purview of the BD (and the ICU for the Subsidised Buildings as defined below).

965. According to the BD (as agreed by the ICU), such an unsafe building works procedure would contravene at least the following statutory provisions, codes of practice and practice notes:

(i) Regulation 16(1) of the B(C)R: failing to adopt appropriate construction methods and procedures and failing to take appropriate precautionary measures;

(ii) Regulation 35(a) of the B(C)R: failing to design or construct the building so as to, in case of fire, inhibit the spread of fire within the building and to the buildings nearby;

(iii) Regulation 40 of the B(P)R: failing to provide adequate lighting for the staircases used as means of escape;

(iv) Performance Requirement C6 of the BD Fire Safety Code: failing to provide fire safety provisions to a building undergoing repair or maintenance with due consideration to

the hazard imposed by the works and the fire safety precaution available;

(v) Clause F5.6(a) of the BD Fire Safety Code: failing to maintain the means of escape of the building under renovation and repair works at all times free from obstruction and adequately signed and lit;

(vi) Clause E13.1(a) of the BD Fire Safety Code: failing to ensure that the linings of internal walls, ceilings and decorative finishes within the protected exits meet the relevant standard as per Table E1 of the same code;

(vii) Paragraph 3.5.2(E)(e) of the BD MBIS Code: making alterations to means of escape or fire resisting construction material resulting in deficiencies in fire safety; and

(viii) PNAP APP-65: failing to ensure that clear glass was used for staircases and staircase windows for each storey having an aggregate glass area of not less than one-tenth of the plan area.

B6. Control over the use of building materials

966. In addition, the BD is also responsible for setting the safety and health standards, and requirements of building materials.

967. In general, building materials including those used in new building construction and repair works are governed by the requirements stipulated in the B(C)R. Under Regulation 3 of the B(C)R, all materials used in building works must be of a nature and quality suitable for their

intended use or purpose; adequately mixed or prepared; and applied, used or fixed so as to perform adequately their intended functions. The materials used must be adequately tested. Under Regulation 16(1) of the B(C)R, appropriate construction methods and procedures must be adopted and appropriate precautionary measures must be taken in carrying out any building works.

968. According to the BD, their regulations have focused on major building materials, i.e. those involving structural elements and fire resisting functions such as concrete, structural steel, fire-rated doors, etc..

969. For repair works involving only MW, including prescribed repair works under the MBIS, the major building materials (e.g. concrete repair materials) meeting the required standards should be shown on the prescribed plans prepared by the PBPs or RCs which will be submitted to the BA for record. No approval of such plans or consent for commencement of works is required under the BO.

970. The following building materials have been identified as responsible for the rapid spread of the fire: (i) scaffolding protective nets, plastic sheeting and canvas, (ii) foam boards; and (iii) walkways used on working platforms, toe-boards and the fastenings of bamboo members. The BD has jurisdiction over the control of these materials.

(I) Scaffolding protective nets, plastic sheeting and canvas

971. The BD has provided guidelines to the PBPs, the RCs and other practitioners through codes of practice, practice notes, guidelines and circular letters with a view to ensuring safety relating to the design and construction of scaffolds and protective nets. These publications include:

(i) BD Fire Safety Code;

(ii) Code of Practice for Demolition of Buildings 2004 and the subsequent amendments in 2016 and 2023;

(iii) Code of Practice for Site Supervision 2009 (2024 Edition);

(iv) BD MBIS Code;

(v) PNAP APP-23 on Hoardings, Covered Walkways and Gantries (including Temporary Access for Construction Vehicles) – Part IX of B(P)R ;

(vi) PNAP APP-70 on "Use of Plastic Sheet to Cover Scaffolding outside Buildings";

(vii) PNRC 26 on "Use of Plastic Sheet to Cover Scaffolding outside Buildings";

(viii) PNRC 85 on "Fire Retardant Performance of Protective Nets, Screens, Tarpaulin and Plastic Sheeting Installed on Scaffolding of External Walls";

(ix) Guidelines on the Design and Construction of Bamboo Scaffolds;

(x) Technical Guidelines on MWCS (2024 edition) and the subsequent amendments in 2025 ("TG on MW");

(xi) BD 2023 Circular;

(xii) BD October 2025 Circular; and

(xiii) Circular letters to PBPs and RCs on "Use Fire Retardant Protective Net/Screen/Tarpaulin/Plastic Sheeting on Façade of Buildings under Construction, Demolition, Alteration and Addition, Repair or Minor Works" dated 27 November 2025.

972. Whilst most of the publications mentioned above specify that protective net, screen, tarpaulin and plastic sheeting (collectively known as protective materials) at scaffolding should possess fire-retardant properties meeting the recognised standards, there is nothing to clarify what those standards are. It was only in 2023, following the fire in the Mariners' Club, that the BD 2023 Circular started to specify that Guobiao Standards GB 5725-2009-Safety nets, British Standard BS 5867-2:2008, and American Standard NFPA 701:2019 are acceptable recognised fire-retardant standards for protective materials used on scaffolds. Other standards of equivalent fire-retardant performance as per the above recognised standards may also be used. This Report will refer to these standards collectively as the "BD 2023 Standards". The BD 2023 Standards started to appear in the subsequent publications and documents such as PNRC 85, TG on MW and the Code of Practice for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety issued by the LD ("LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety").

973. The BD 2023 Circular was issued by the BD after the fire in the Mariners' Club on 2 March 2023. Further, after the fire incident involving bamboo scaffoldings at Chinachem Tower on 18 October 2025, the BD issued the BD October 2025 Circular requiring building professionals and RCs to take immediate action to inspect and ascertain that the protective materials installed to cover the façade of buildings with works (including any sites under construction, demolition, repair and minor works) possess the appropriate fire-retardant properties in compliance with the

recognised standards to prevent the spread of fire should a fire occur. Attention was also drawn to relevant requirements stipulated in various codes of practice, practice notes, circular letters and guidelines.

974. The PBPs and the RCs are required to ensure that protective materials meeting the required fire-retardant standards are used in building works under Regulations 3 and 16 of the B(C)R. The PBPs and the RCs shall ascertain if the materials used are in compliance with the required standards by:

(i) obtaining certificates or testing reports by accredited laboratory from manufacturers or suppliers and sending samples for testing by an accredited laboratory as necessary, as stipulated in PNAP APP-118 and PNRC 48; and

(ii) after 19 December 2025, following the procedures as set out in the new PNRC 85, causing the scaffolding protective materials for external walls to be sampled and tested by accredited laboratories.

975. Prior to the fire in WF Court, the BD would accept certificates or test reports by laboratories about the fire-retardant properties of the protective nets. However, Madam Cheung Yuk Ching, Karen ("Madam Karen Cheung") (witness no 63), AD/Mandatory Building Inspection of the BD, agrees that the BD would accept these certificates and test reports on their face value without taking extra steps to verify the genuineness of these documents. Further, no site inspections would be conducted to check the fire-retardant properties of the protective nets.

(II) Foam boards

976. During the execution of the Works at WF Court, PC&E had instructed its sub-contractors (or sub-subcontractors) to use foam boards to cover the windows of the residential units to prevent damage that might be caused by the works to the external walls of the buildings.

977. The use of foam boards for such a purpose may have a number of undesirable effects. First, the foam boards, which are highly inflammable, would provide fuel load to intensify the blaze in the case of fire. Second, they would block the occupants' view of what is happening outside in the case of a façade fire, jeopardising their chance of early evacuation and survival. Third, they would block the lighting and ventilation of the residential units.

978. Whilst there seemed to be a conflict between the evidence of Mr Tse Kam Ming, who is the former Senior Building Surveyor /Building Control seconded from the BD to the ICU and now retired, and Mr Ku Siu Ping, who is the Senior Maintenance Surveyor and the head of the MBIS Team of the ICU, as to whether the said use of the foam boards is unlawful, both witnesses now agree that non-temporary use of the foam boards for such a purpose would contravene at least the following statutory provisions, codes of practice and practice notes:

(i) Regulation 16(1) of the B(C)R: failing to adopt appropriate construction methods and procedures and failing to take appropriate precautionary measures;

(ii) Regulation 30 of the B(P)R: failing to ensure that every room used for habitation shall be provided with natural lighting and ventilation; and

(iii) Paragraph 4(c) of the PNAP APP-70: failing to avoid the obstruction to natural ventilation or lighting of occupied buildings under renovation by sheeting as far as practicable.

Further, Mr Tse Kam Ming and Mr Ku Siu Ping agree that:

(i) Temporary use of the foam boards to cover the windows for a short period of time, with the purpose of preventing the windows from being damaged by the chiselling works in the external walls, may not necessarily be unlawful. The staff of PC&E told Mr Ku Siu Ping that chiselling works would take place for every three storeys at a time. The foam boards would be removed after the completion of such works before the commencement of the work for the next three storeys. Such temporary use of foam boards should not have posed a huge fire risk, and such building works procedure may not necessarily be unlawful under the statutory provisions in the BO.

(ii) Prolonged use of the foam boards to cover the windows of numerous residential units, as it was in the case of WF Court, is certainly unsafe and would contravene Regulation 16(1) of the B(C)R as stated in the preceding paragraph.

979. The above aside, the following provisions and code may also be relevant in this context:

(i) Regulation 3 of the B(C)R: ensure that all materials used in building works are of a nature or quality suitable for their intended use or purpose or adequately tested by recognised tests;

(ii) Regulation 35(a) of the B(C)R: design and construct the building so as to, in case of fire, inhibit the spread of fire within the building and to the buildings nearby; and

(iii) Performance Requirement C6 of the BD Fire Safety Code: provide fire safety provisions to a building undergoing repair or maintenance with due consideration to the hazard imposed by the works and the fire safety precaution available.

980. It seems that Mr Ku Siu Ping had some doubt about the legal position relating to the use of foam boards when he said the following in his first witness statement: "*we cannot deduce that the use of foam boards is a contravention of section 16 of B(C)R*". Yet, he clarified his position at the Evidential Hearing as stated at paragraph 978.

981. On 16 March 2026, the BD issued a Circular Letter stating that:

(i) Combustible materials (e.g. foam boards) must not be affixed to external walls and windows.

(ii) Windows must not be covered (except brief, localised covering during specific works such as hacking using non-combustible materials), so as not to obstruct lighting and occupants' line of sight, which would make it difficult to detect a fire.

982. The post-fire Circular Letter confirms the BD's position, now made explicit, that foam boards should never have been used as they were at WF Court. The Circular Letter created no new obligation. It spelt out what the existing statutory framework, in particular Regulation 16 of the B(C)R, already required.

(III) Walkways used on working platforms, toe-boards and the fastenings of bamboo members

983. According to the first reply from the DEVB to the request made by the Committee, the DEVB acknowledges that there are currently no regulations or guidelines requiring these temporary building materials (i.e. walkways used on working platforms, toe-boards and the fastenings of bamboo members) to meet any particular standards of fire resistance. The regulatory authority is relying on the general provisions in Regulations 3 and 16(1) of the B(C)R in regulating the use of these materials in BMR sites.

984. The LD has published the addenda to the LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety and the Code of Practice for Metal Scaffolding Safety on 31 July 2026 to give immediate effect to measures which can enhance scaffolding safety. Amongst others, the revision aims to set out the material requirements for scaffolding toe-boards, including that the materials used do not increase the fire risk.

B7. Inspections, checks and enforcement actions

985. The BD regularly carries out inspections and audit checks at building works sites, which are conducted on a risk-basis having regard to the complexity and risk level of the construction activities. There would be more frequent inspections and checks for high-risk activities.

986. During site audits for approved building works, the BD would check the on-site documentation, site supervision records, specific work requirements such as sequence of demolition works, ground settlement monitoring, shoring integrity, any malpractice or dangerous practice, contraventions of the BO, witness specific tests for foundation works, etc.. The BD also conducts on-site rebound hammer tests for concrete strength and concrete cover meter tests for checking alignment of reinforcement. The main purpose of the site audits is to ensure the PBPs and RCs are duly performing their statutory duties and responsibilities in ensuring the works are carried out safely and in accordance with the provisions in the BO. For new building developments, the BD would also conduct on-site inspection upon the receipt of an application for occupation permit for a new building.

987. Where in the opinion of the BA any building works are being carried out in contravention of the provisions in the BO, or building works are being carried out in dangerous conditions, the BA may serve a cease works order to the RC requiring cessation of the works. Where any building has been rendered dangerous or liable to become dangerous, the BA may serve an order requiring the owner of the building to carry out certain building works (e.g. repair works) to make the building safe. In case the BA finds any dilapidation or defect in a building, he or she may serve an order requiring the owner of the building to carry out works or appoint an AP to carry out investigation and submit remedial works proposals.

988. The Works at WF Court are MW according to the BD's building works control system. The regulatory oversight of the Works was, however, carried out by the ICU for the reasons further elaborated in the next section in this Chapter on the regulatory regime under the ICU.

989. For the BD, MW are of relatively lower complexity and risk. Hence, less stringent random audit checks are conducted for ensuring their compliance with the provisions in the BO. A MW project is subject to an audit check which comprises desktop study of the submitted documents and site audit check ("SAC"). The desktop study focuses on document and procedural compliance, which includes checking the completeness and consistency of the submitted information and whether the works shown in the submissions are in compliance with the statutory requirements. A SAC aims at ensuring that the MW comply with the provisions in the BO and are in general the same as that shown in the prescribed plans and documents. If a desktop study reveals possible non-compliance, a SAC by inspection will be carried out to identify if there is any irregularity.

990. To provide a more objective sampling basis, the BD has since 2023 adopted the ISO 2859-1 "Sampling Procedures for Inspection by Attributes" to guide the selection of MW for audit checks. The audit checks were set to require successfully conducting a minimum of 315 samples of the submissions in order to achieve an acceptable level of quality control over the performance of the RIs and the RCs under the BO. Statistics of audit checks under the MBIS from year 2022 to 2025 are as follows:

MBIS	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**
(a) Total number of MBI submissions received (including Form MBI 3, MBI 3a and MBI 4 under Section 30B(3), Section 30B(4) and Section 30B(5))	11,976	13,623	9,984	10,451
(b) Total number of audit checks completed (Number of cases with document checks)	1,962	1,511	796	1,602
(c) Number of successful site audits conducted in item (b)	374	367	184 (*)	390
(d) Successful site audits required under ISO 2859-1-1999	315	315	315	315

(*) Resources redeployed to conducted the Special Operation on "Removal of Potential Danger in Exteriors of Building" due to the fallen object incidents in 2024.

991. Apart from identifying irregularities of RIs and RCs during audit checks, the BD handles public reports and complaints about the performance of RIs and RCs and reports concerning the execution and safety of the repair works. In order to safeguard against possible non-compliance, upon receiving reports or complaints from the public on suspected irregularities, the BD would carry out site inspection to identify any obvious danger on site, malpractice of RIs or RCs or contravention of the BO, and would take appropriate follow-up actions accordingly. According to Madam Karen Cheung, except for some emergency cases or where assistance from site personnel is required, site inspections are surprise inspections.

992. If an obvious danger is identified on site, the BD officers will demand immediate rectification to remove the danger and stop the dangerous practice. The BD may follow up the case by serving cease works orders against the RC, requiring it to cease works and submit an incident report, conduct a safety audit and submit a remedial proposal to justify safe and proper execution of works before the BD will consider lifting the cease works order. For irregularities of a minor nature, the BD may issue verbal warnings, advisory letters or warning letters to the RI or RC concerned. Prosecution or disciplinary action against the concerned RI or RC would be considered for major irregularities.

993. For RIs and RCs who have conviction records in relation to the offences under the BO, due to personal data and privacy concerns, the BD does not publish the conviction records in the public domain. For RIs and RCs who have been disciplined by the disciplinary boards under the BO, the BD will publish the decisions of the disciplinary boards through press releases and the BD's website, and the decisions are also published in the Gazette.

994. The Works at WF Court were not under the supervision of the BD. It was delegated to the ICU for the reasons given in the next section.

C. THE ICU

C1. Background for the establishment of the ICU

995. Pursuant to the BO, the planning, design and construction of private buildings are required to comply with the BO and its subsidiary regulations.

996. The Government has been providing public housing for Hong Kong residents since 1954. In 1972, the Government announced the "Ten-Year Housing Scheme" and in 1973 reorganised the various agencies originally responsible for public housing to establish the HA to promote the Government's public housing programme. The Housing Ordinance (Cap. 283) ("HO") was enacted in 1973, which also amended Section 41 of the BO to exempt public housing buildings designed and constructed by the HA from the application of the BO.

997. With the introduction of the HOS, Section 18 of the HO was amended in 1978 to the effect that the BO shall apply to any such HA buildings if any part of the buildings were sold after the completion of construction. Following the above, HOS buildings, once sold to private owners, are subject to the control of the BO.

998. Since WF Court is an HOS estate, by virtue of Section 41(1)(aa) of the BO, it was exempted from the provisions of the BO at the time when it was built in 1983. Hence, the BD was not involved in the design or construction of the buildings in WF Court. No occupation permit was issued by the BA under the BO for WF Court. After WF Court was sold to individual private owners, it came under the purview of the BO by virtue of Section 18 of the HO. As further explained below, WF Court is a sold HOS estate regulated by the ICU in accordance with the delegation under the BO.

999. Since 1978, upon completion of construction of HOS buildings with completion certificates issued by the HD and after the units were sold to private owners, such buildings would be subject to the control of the BO. The control of these buildings was exercised by the then Buildings Ordinance Office ("BOO") which was the predecessor of the BD. However, BOO was not provided with "as-built" drawings of completed HOS blocks which had inhibited its enforcement of the BO. Nevertheless,

HA, as the property manager, could rely on the powers derived from the Deeds of Mutual Covenant ("DMC") entered into by all flat owners at the time of purchase to exercise control on the residential portion of such buildings. At the same time, the HD was also responsible for managing the non-residential portion of these estates retained and owned by the HA under the land lease, such as car parks and commercial premises.

1000. The HA anticipated that, after the expiration of the transfer restriction period (i.e. private owners of HOS units may sell their units after the specified period from the date of signing the transfer deed from the HA to the owners), a large number of HOS units would be resold. The HA therefore considered it necessary to strengthen the supervision and enforcement of illegal alteration works in HOS estates. In 1990, the Government began to work out how HOS buildings, particularly after any part of them were sold, could be controlled subject to the BO.

1001. Eventually, it was decided that the best arrangement was for the HA to take up the control of sold HOS buildings under the BO by way of authorisation of authority under the BO. A team of experienced BOO officers would be seconded to the HA to help to achieve consistency in the interpretation and enforcement of the provisions in the BO.

1002. Pursuant to Section 2(2) of the BO, since 1992 the then Director of Buildings and Lands started to authorise officers of the HD to take up the duties and responsibilities on behalf of the BA to exercise building control over sold HOS buildings under the BO. The first authorisation instrument was issued on 25 June 1992 authorising certain officers of the HD to act on behalf of the BA in matters arising from different provisions.

1003. In November 2000, the HA established the ICU as part of the reform following a series of piling scandals in the late 1990s. The

authorisation of the HD under the BO to exercise building control for sold HOS buildings has since 2004 been redirected to officers of the ICU. The first authorisation instrument involving officers of the ICU was issued on 28 April 2004. Officers of the ICU were authorised to act on behalf of the BA in matters arising from different provisions of the BO, and all matters arising under the BO in respect of minor A&A works.

1004. In March 2007, in line with the BD's level of authorisation in processing plans, the authorisation of power of processing A&A plans was extended to all senior professional officers in the ICU. A condition was imposed requiring the officers of the ICU should have adequate experience in plan processing. It was explained in the cover memo that "adequate experience in plan processing" means "experience of two years or more in processing plan submissions under the BO or under the ICU's administrative building control system".

1005. With the full implementation of the MBIS and the MWIS on 30 June 2012, the authorisation instrument was updated on the same day by adding delegation of powers to the ICU for the provisions relating to the MBIS and the MWIS[103].

1006. There were then some re-organisations within the Government putting the ICU under different entities. At present, the ICU works and reports to the Permanent Secretary which was renamed as the Permanent Secretary for Housing ("PSH"). The most recent authorisation to officers of the ICU made before the WF Court fire incident was signed by the DB on 12 December 2023. Officers of the ICU were authorised to act on behalf of BA in matters arising from different provisions of BO, including Sections 22(1), 23, 24, 24A, 24AA, 24B, 24C, 25, 26, 26A, 27, 27A, 27B, 27C, 28, 29, 29A, 30, 30B, 30C, 31, 32A, 32B, 33, 34, 36C, 36F,

103 See Sections 30B, 30C, 40(1BE) and Schedule 7 of the BO.

36G, 36H, 40(1BE), 44, 51, 52 and 53, and Schedule 7 of the BO, and all regulations of the Building (Appeal) Regulation, and all matters arising under the BO in respect of A&A works and MW commenced under the simplified requirements. Some provisions under the B(P)R regarding provision of natural lighting and ventilation to escape staircases and ancillary offices etc.. were added in this latest authorisation such that the senior professional officers of the ICU are authorised with power to grant modification or exemption for these provisions under Section 42 of the BO when processing plan submissions for A&A works.

1007. Basically, the scope, extent and nature of the powers and duties delegated by the DB to the officers of the ICU are the same as those delegated to the officers of the BD in handling all matters in connection with building control of existing buildings, the MBIS, the MWIS and the MWCS, as performed by the Existing Buildings Divisions 1 & 2, Mandatory Building Inspection Division and Corporate Services Division of the BD.

1008. Apart from being staffed with senior professional officers seconded from the BD to exercise building control over sold HOS buildings, the fact that: (i) the HA has all along been responsible for the design and construction of the HOS buildings (an area which is exempted from the BO); and (ii) after such units are sold, the HA has still retained roles in the management, maintenance and transfer of HOS units, has rendered the ICU to be better suited to take up the statutory control functions. In particular:

(i) The HA has been responsible for approval and supervision of the design and construction of all HOS and other subsidised housing projects, and keeps all relevant construction records. The BD has not been involved in the approval stage nor supervision on the design and construction stages, and does not have any relevant

construction records of HOS and other HA subsidised housing developments.

(ii) The HA provides a 10-year Structural Safety Guarantee (and 20-years for Tin Shui Wai area) for flats under HOS, Private Sector Participation Scheme, Tenants Purchase Scheme ("TPS"), Flat-for-Sale Scheme, and Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme ("GSH").

(iii) The HA as the DMC manager is empowered to manage the buildings by exercising powers conferred under the DMC, and such role shall be non-transferable during the period specified in the DMC.

(iv) The HA retains partial undivided shares in some public housing estates as the owners of these shares and its rights would not be affected even when the DMC manager role is assigned to others.

(v) Individual HOS units should not be transferred or sold within a restricted period. During this period, owners may only sell directly to HA or through the HOS secondary market. Even upon the expiration of the restriction period, owners are required to pay land premium to the HA before any transaction.

1009. The Director of Housing and the DB also signed a Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") on 26 June 2009. Following the piling scandals as mentioned above, the MOU was made for the purpose of ensuring that the HA and the HD would commit administratively its adherence to the requirements in the BO relating to the design and construction of all HA buildings. Hence, the MOU takes on a scope much broader than sold HOS buildings that are regulated by the ICU under the BA's delegated authority. The roles of the ICU under the MOU are not limited to exercising delegated authorities over sold HOS buildings but also include the administrative building control of HA buildings. Since its first signing on 26 June 2009, the MOU has been reviewed biennially. The latest version of MOU was signed on 1 July 2022 and reviewed in June 2024 (which considered that no amendment was required).

1010. Paragraph 3.2 of the MOU provides that the BD will oversee the ICU's delegated duties by receiving six-monthly reports. Since 2009, a management level liaison meeting between the Head of the ICU and the Deputy Director of the BD and their teams has been held at a half-year interval where both sides would discuss the six-monthly report. Cases worthy of the attention of the BD or in need of the BD's advice can be brought up for discussion with a view to upholding the ICU's performance to be in line with the policies, standards and practices of the BD. Apart from the said management level meetings, the BD and the ICU maintain communications by holding various working level meetings on regular basis to keep the ICU abreast of the BD's latest policies, standards and practices in enforcing the BO relevant to the ICU's delegated duties.

1011. That is the design under the MOU. Whether it was able to achieve the said purpose, in particular in the case of WF Court, will be further discussed in Chapter 11 below.

1012. Paragraphs 5 to 7 of the MOU deal with the secondment of the BD's officers to the ICU. The BD has seconded three officers to ICU, including one senior structural engineer and two senior building surveyors, to act as advisers. According to the BD, by seconding its officers to work in the ICU as part of the team, the BD has been supporting the ICU in discharging its delegated duties and upholding its performance in line with the policies, standards and practices of the BD and in accordance with the provisions in the BO.

1013. Paragraph 14 of the MOU covers referrals by the ICU to the BD for prosecution and disciplinary actions. No disciplinary cases were referred from the ICU to the BD before 2023. Between 2023 and 2025, the ICU had referred a total of five cases to the BD for disciplinary actions.

1014. The ICU has 333 staff, 154 of whom are responsible for statutory building control, including architects, surveyors and other professionals. From July 2022 until February 2026, Mr Lau Fu Kwok was the Head of the ICU.

1015. There are two divisions in the ICU which are relevant for the regulatory oversight of the Works at WF Court: the MBIS Team and the MW Team.

1016. During the WF Court renovation period until the date of the fire, Mr Ku Siu Ping was the supervisor of the MBIS Team, a senior professional officer who supervised five professional officers and 12 non-professional staff.

1017. On the other hand, the MW Team comprised 10 professional and technical staff. Mr Yung Siu Lun was the supervisor of the MW Team at the time of the fire in WF Court.

C2. Selection of target Subsidised Buildings for the MBIS

1018. The MBIS Team is responsible for the implementation of the MBIS for buildings in HOS, TPS, GSH, Buy or Rent Option Scheme ("BRO") and Public Rental Housing with divested retail and car-parking facilities. These buildings and properties are collectively referred to as the "Subsidised Buildings".

1019. The MBIS Team regularly selects target Subsidised Buildings for implementation of the MBIS in accordance with BD's Guideline on Mandatory Building/Window Inspection Scheme Selection of Target Buildings (Version: 30 April 2025). For HOS, TPS, GSH and BRO, a Selection Panel is formed to provide advice to the ICU on the selection of the target buildings.

1020. The selection is made based on a point system, and buildings and estates with higher points have a greater chance of being selected under the MBIS and MWIS. Under the old point system which was applicable in the case of WF Court, a building with an IO carried five points, which would significantly increase the chance of the building being selected for the MBIS.

1021. The Committee cannot understand the rationale behind such an arrangement, as a building under the management of an IO should be in a better condition as compared with those buildings which have no IO. Hence, the BA's attention should focus more on the latter. The Committee is pleased to note that the point assessment criteria had since been changed, and now a "three-nils" building would attract 10 points under the new point system whereas a building with an IO would not attract any points.

1022. The selection of WF Court as one of the target buildings under the MBIS regime took place in 2013. Before finalising the list of the target buildings, the ICU approached the IOs of the nominated buildings, including that of WF Court, giving them an opportunity of making replies. After finalising the list of the target buildings, the ICU sent a pre-notification letter for the MBIS to the IO of WF Court on 29 April 2014. The SNs for all eight buildings in WF Court were then issued to its IO on 10 June 2016. Upon the requests made by the IO of WF Court, the ICU granted extension of time for compliance with the SNs for a total of five times from June 2017 to October 2019.

C3. Regulatory oversight of BMR works under the MBIS regime

1023. The regulatory oversight of BMR works in the Subsidised Buildings under the MBIS regime falls within the purview of the MBIS Team. Despite that, according to the ICU, the responsibility of properly carrying out the pre-inspection preparation works rests with the RI. Following the BD's practice, the ICU's roles are mainly to check and follow up on the Inspection Report prior to the commencement of works and the Completion Report after the completion of works submitted by the RI, with the relevant details provided below.

1024. When the prescribed inspection by an RI/Inspection is completed and if repair is required, the RI/Inspection shall submit a certificate of building inspection in the specified form (Form MBI 3), together with an Inspection Report incorporating a repair proposal, within seven days after completion of the prescribed inspection for the BA's record. Subsequently, the RI/Supervision shall submit a certificate of building repair in a specified form (Form MBI 4) together with a Completion Report within 14 days after completion of the prescribed repair for the BA's record. ln cases where no prescribed repair is required, a Form MBI 3a together with

an Inspection Report should be submitted within seven days after completion of the prescribed inspection. In respect of the case of WF Court, the forms would have been submitted for the ICU's record.

1025. The ICU's roles in the handling of Forms MBI 3, MBI 3a and MBI 4 are set out in two documents: (i) the ICU's Control Procedures - 7.13 for the Mandatory Building/Window Inspection Procedure ("COP 7.13"); and (ii) paragraph 2 of the ICU Guideline - Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme: Preliminary, Fundamental and Audit Check on Submissions (Version: December 2022) ("ICUG(MBIS)").

1026. In gist, upon receipt of Forms MBI 3, MBI 3a and MBI 4, the ICU would check the forms and update the records in its Mandatory Inspection Management System ("MIMS").

1027. The MBIS Team then conducts preliminary checks, fundamental checks and audit checks on Forms MBI 3, MBI 3a and MBI 4 received by it. The MBIS Team follows the procedures in the ICUG(MBIS) in the conduct of these checks.

1028. For a preliminary check, it includes:

(i) verifying of the registration status of the RI against the record as shown in the RI register maintained by the BD;

(ii) checking that the inspection or repair works of the building were carried out before the RI's registration expiry date and that the signature of the RI matches with the record; and

(iii) in the case of any irregularity in the MBI Form, issuing a letter inviting the RI for rectification or a letter of rejection.

1029. After the preliminary checks, all Forms MBI 3, MBI 3a and MBI 4 submitted by the RI would be randomly selected through a balloting exercise. Cases not selected in the balloting exercise would be subject to fundamental checks, whereas those selected would be subject to audit checks.

1030. For a fundamental check, it includes:

(i) checking whether the relevant reports or proposals have been submitted, duly completed and signed;

(ii) for the case of submission for partial completion of building, ascertaining that the submission has contained all the necessary information;

(iii) in the case any irregularity, issuing a letter requiring the RI to rectify or a letter of rejection; and

(iv) if no irregularity is found in the fundamental check:

(a) for Form MBI 3, the ICU would then issue a standard acknowledgement letter to the RI if no other audit work is pending; and

(b) for Forms MBI 3a and MBI 4, the ICU would issue a standard compliance letter to the homeowners or IO for the submitted form and the supporting documents if no other audit work is pending.

1031. As for an audit check, it is conducted by the ICU pursuant to its COP 7.13 and ICUG(MBIS), the requirements thereunder are largely modelled on those under BD's MBI Manual, Section 2, Instruction No. 6 titled "Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme - Audit Check". For each month, 16 cases are sampled for audit checks via MIMS. For a Form MBI 3 subject to audit check, a further audit check on Form MBI 4 would also be carried out upon notification of the completion of the prescribed repair by the RI via the submission of the Form MBI 4. In other words, if a Form MBI 3 is selected for audit, then the corresponding Form MBI 4 submitted in the completion stage would also be audited without the need for separate sampling or balloting.

1032. An audit check consists of both a document audit and a site audit. Document audit would be conducted for all the balloted cases while site audit would be conducted on one-third of the selected cases. In other words, of the cases selected for document audits, one-third would further proceed to site audits whereas the remaining two-thirds would stop at the document audit stage, and this applies to all relevant forms, i.e. Forms MBI 3, MBI 3a and MBI 4. The ICU may approach the owner or owner's representative or the RI if necessary to arrange access to the site concerned for audit.

1033. The factors to be considered during document audit (e.g. whether the method adopted for the building inspection is generally appropriate) and site audit (e.g. whether the observed defects or condition of certain building elements are generally in agreement with the findings stated in the Inspection Report) are set out in Appendix A of the ICUG(MBIS), which is an audit checklist to be completed during the course of an audit check.

1034. If any irregularity is identified through an audit check, follow up actions will be taken, e.g. issuing a notification letter or email to the RI requiring for clarification or rectification as necessary.

1035. According to such procedures, even if a building under a MBIS project has been selected for a site audit, MBIS Team would only visit the relevant site once before the commencement of the works and once after the completion of the works. Though the ICU has regulatory oversight over the execution of BMR works, there is no site visit by the MBIS Team during the execution stage. The ICU takes the view that the RI and RC have the duty to ensure the safety of the execution of BMR works. Unless there are complaints lodged, the MBIS Team would not take any initiative to monitor or supervise the execution of BMR works.

C4. Supervision of BMR works under the MWCS

1036. Since the repair works required to be done under the MBIS are mainly MW, MBIS projects are usually supervised under both the MBIS regime and the MWCS regime. As WF Court estate consists of eight Subsidised Buildings, the supervision of the Works at WF Court also falls within the purview of the MW Team of the ICU which is responsible for exercising the statutory control over the execution of MW under the BO.

1037. There were 48 MW submissions for the Works at WF Court, with 24 of them falling within Class I MW and the remaining 24 falling within Class II MW.

1038. For Class I MW, a Notice of Commencement (Form MW01) has to be submitted with a minimum seven days before the commencement of the works, and a Certificate of Completion (Form MW02) has to be submitted within 14 days after the completion of the works.

1039. For Class II MW, similar forms (Form MW03 as Notice of Commencement and Form MW04 as Certificate of Completion) have to be submitted within the same time frame.

1040. Similar to the regulatory regime under the MBIS, the ICU makes reference to the BD's procedures for audit check of MW submissions as set out in: (i) BD's Minor Works and Signboard Control Section Manual Part 1 ("BD's MW Manual"), Section 5, Instruction No. 1 titled "Procedures for Audit Check of Minor Works Submissions"; and (ii) BD's Interim Guideline on Selecting Minor Works Submissions for Audit Check, in devising its own procedures for exercising the statutory control under the MWCS. Such devised procedures are set out in: (i) ICU's Control Procedures 7.14 for Minor Works ("COP 7.14"); and (ii) ICU Guideline titled "Audit Arrangement for Minor Works Submission"("ICUG(MW)").

1041. According to the ICU's COP 7.14, for all MW submissions made to the ICU, the ICU would conduct a form screening check and a preliminary check, which are mainly to ascertain whether the information submitted is complete, in accordance with a checklist at Appendix A to the ICUG(MW).

1042. Further to the form screening check and the preliminary check, the ICU would select certain MW cases to conduct an audit fundamental check ("AFC"), a SAC or pre-commencement site audit check ("PSAC") in accordance with the procedures stated in the ICUG(MW).

1043. For an AFC, it is a form of document check focusing on the procedural compliance with the provisions in the B(MW)R. It is conducted both before commencement and after completion of the works (in respect of the MW submissions). The details for conducting an AFC are all documented.

1044. For a SAC which is only conducted after completion of works (i.e. in respect of only Certificate of Completion and Notice and Certificate of Completion), it aims at ensuring that the works specified in the submissions comply generally with the provisions in the BO and its subsidiary legislations, and are in general the same as those shown in the prescribed plans.

1045. For a PSAC, it is a kind of SAC which only focuses on "seven-day notification" before the commencement of works under Regulations 30 and 33 of the B(MW)R regarding any Class I and Class II MW. To ensure that the commencement of MW does not contravene these regulations, it is necessary to carry out a PSAC to check whether the works have been commenced within seven days from the date of receipt of the MW submissions. As such, a PSAC is conducted within seven calendar days from the date of receipt of the relevant MW submission.

1046. According to the ICUG(MW), audit cases for MW submission would be selected either by priority or at random.

1047. In gist, for certain cases such as those considered to be of higher risk of falling under the wrong class of MW and thereby wrongly subject to looser control, or cases of special concern such as those triggered by complaints or enquiries, or cases in suspicion of contravening certain provisions in the BO, they would be prioritised for selection for audit. The relevant details and selection percentages to be audited under such prioritisation are set out in paragraphs 14 to 16 of the ICUG(MW).

1048. Apart from the priority cases arrangement, there is also a random audit arrangement. In gist, for Class I and Class II MW for which both Notification of Commencement (i.e. Forms MW01 and MW03) and Certificate of Completion (i.e. Forms MW02 and MW04) have to be submitted to the ICU, the Forms MW01 and MW03 would be selected for

AFC randomly by the Minor Works Management System upon receipt of the relevant form. Once a Form MW01 or MW03 is selected for AFC, the corresponding Form MW02 or MW04 submitted later in the completion stage would be assigned for AFC and SAC automatically.

1049. A certain percentage of the submissions for Forms MW01 and MW03 which have been selected for AFC would be further selected randomly for PSAC.

1050. The yearly audit targets for each type of check are set out in the table below.

Type of audit check	**Target number of checks per year**	**Actual number of checks in 2025**
AFC	1,070	1,176
SAC	180	224
PSAC	25	25
Total	**1,275**	**1,425** *(Around 5.17% of the total of 27,585 MW submissions received in 2025)*

1051. If any irregularity is found and not rectified by the PBP or RC, the ICU would issue a reminder letter or even a warning letter (if irregularity is not rectified after the issue of the reminder letter) to the relevant persons or companies. If the PBP or RC fails to rectify the irregularity in the warning letter, follow-up actions such as coaching, cautioning, prosecution or disciplinary action may be taken.

1052. The MW Team may refer certain Class I MW submissions to ICU's Site Monitoring Team ("SM Team") for handling. According to BD's Technical Memorandum for Supervision Plans 2009 and the Code of Practice for Site Supervision 2009, for certain Class I MW, a SP should be submitted, which would warrant referral by ICU's MW Team to ICU's SM Team for the conduct of an audit. An audit check would be conducted for such SPs as part of the AFC. No less than 20% of the SPs for MW would be selected randomly for audit checks. Such audit check is conducted in accordance with a checklist, which mainly concerns the checking of the qualification and experience of the TCPs involved, as well as the frequency level of the inspection.

1053. Following the same practice adopted by the BD prior to April 2023, even if a MW submission has been selected for a site audit, the MW Team and the SM Team (when a SP is involved) would only visit the relevant site once before the commencement of the work and once upon the completion of the work. Though the ICU has regulatory oversight over the execution of the MW, there is no site visit by the MW Team or the SM Team during the execution stage. The ICU takes the view that the relevant PBPs and RCs have the duty to ensure the safety of the execution of the MW. Unless there are complaints lodged, the MW Team or the SM Team would not take any initiative to monitor or supervise the execution of the MW.

1054. That was the same approach taken by the BD prior to April 2023. However, since April 2023, the BD has adopted the practice of conducting actual site safety inspections for MW cases selected for audit checks, with an update in the BD's Site Monitoring Section Manual ("BD's SM Manual") in December 2025 to reflect such new arrangement. As mentioned above, the 2024 version of the BD's SM Manual specifies that no less than 20% of the new SPs for MW would be selected randomly for an audit check, and so the same proportion of new SPs should require the conduct of actual site inspections. However, the witnesses from the ICU

testified that the BD had not informed them about such a change in its practice before the inferno in WF Court.

D. THE LD

1055. One of the main duties of the LD is to safeguard the occupational safety and health ("OSH") of employees at work. Despite that the OSH regulatory regime is mainly for the benefit and well-being of the workers working at their places of work, the following factors identified as responsible for causing the fire in WF Court and its rapid spread may fall within the purview of the LD:

(i) smoking by workers at BMR sites;

(ii) the erection of access doors at the escape staircases with non-fire-resistant materials;

(iii) the use of scaffolding protective nets with no fire-retardant properties; and

(iv) the use of foam boards to cover the windows of the residential units.

D1. Regulatory regime relating to OSH matters in BMR sites

1056. The LD is responsible for the execution of the regulatory regime under the following OSH legislations:

(i) the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509) ("OSHO") and its subsidiary legislations;

(ii) the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance (Cap. 59) ("FIUO") and its subsidiary legislations, including the following which are most relevant in the present case:

(a) the Construction Sites (Safety) Regulations (Cap. 59I) ("CSSR");

(b) the Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Safety Management) Regulation (Cap. 59AF) ("FIU(SM)R"); and

(c) the Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Safety Officers and Safety Supervisors) Regulations (Cap. 59Z) ("FIU(SOSS)R"); and

(iii) the Boilers and Pressure Vessels Ordinance (Cap. 56).

1057. Under the OSH legislations, the employer, proprietor of an industrial undertaking and principal contractor of a construction site have a general duty to provide a safe working place and a safe system of work for the workers working in their places of work.

1058. In the specific context of BMR works, the OSHO, the FIUO and their subsidiary legislations are applicable for the protection of the safety and health of construction site workers working in BMR sites.

1059. The Works at WF Court, being construction works within the meaning of the legislation, fell within the LD's regulatory jurisdiction. The LD received notification of commencement of the works and was responsible for conducting inspections to ensure worker safety.

1060. As part of the LD's work in administering and enforcing the OSH legislations in relation to construction sites (including BMR sites), the Occupational Safety Officers ("OSOs") of the Occupational Safety - Operations ("OS-O"), OSH Branch of the LD, would conduct occupational safety inspections at construction sites. These inspections are surprise inspections.

1061. Generally, the OSOs would, from point of view of workers' safety, pay attention to the work processes being carried out, plants and machineries being used on the construction sites, safety equipment used by workers, etc., when carrying out the inspections. Properties of construction materials used at a construction site, such as foam boards, are usually not the main focus of OSH inspections.

1062. To ensure the consistency of the inspection and investigation work, the OSOs are each provided with detailed guidance as contained in various administrative instruments, including Orders, Guidelines and Practice Codes relevant to BMR sites.

1063. There are different types of inspection conducted by the OSOs at construction sites. The inspections conducted for the Works at WF Court included "Initial Inspection", "Normal Inspection" and "Special Enforcement Operation":

(i) Initial Inspection – this refers to the first inspection of construction sites upon receiving notifications of construction work from contractors or conducting investigations into complaints or work accidents.

(ii) Normal Inspection – this refers to the routine and general inspections, other than the Initial Inspection, of construction

sites. Most inspections conducted by the OSOs fall under this category.

(iii) Special Enforcement Operation – this refers to territory-wide enforcement campaigns, initiated by the OS-O headquarters, and conducted by the OSOs within a period (normally two to three weeks) to inspect particular sites, activities, plants, or work processes with higher OSH risks for the sake of enhancing regulatory compliance and prevent accidents through intensified enforcement actions.

1064. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the violations detected and the overall OSH performance of individual sites, OSOs may issue written warnings in the form of Construction Site Inspection Reports stating the irregularities detected in the inspection together with advisory items or remarks if applicable, and legal notices such as suspension notice, improvement notice, or special precaution notice to contractors, or bring prosecutions where appropriate. Criminal prosecutions may also be brought to the offenders if necessary.

1065. LD's internal Standing Order No. C-2 (13 November 2023) classifies situations by severity:

(i) Group 1: hazardous work posing imminent risk of death or serious bodily injury: warrants Suspension Notice and immediate prosecution;

(ii) Group 2: breaches posing risks of serious bodily injury or considerable fire hazards: warrants immediate prosecution and Improvement Notices;

(iii) Group 3: less serious breaches: warrants Improvement Notices; and

(iv) Group 4: breaches not normally giving rise to imminent or serious risks: warrants warnings only.

D2. Specific OSH regulatory regime governing smoking by workers in BMR sites

1066. It is important to note that at the time of the fire at WF Court, there was no specific legislation prohibiting smoking by workers in construction sites. However, there was one specific statutory regulation which enables the Commissioner for Labour ("CL") to, under certain specified circumstances, issue a notice prohibiting smoking in construction sites.

1067. Under Regulation 53 of the CSSR applicable at the time (April 2023 version), where, in any construction site, any flammable liquid or any mixture containing any such liquid or any substance or thing which in the opinion of the CL involves danger from fire is used or intended to be used, the CL may by order in writing prohibit smoking and the use of naked lights in the construction site. Failure to comply with the prohibition notice is liable to a maximum fine of HK$400,000 in the case of a contractor and HK$150,000 in the case of a worker.

1068. It is understandable that, by reason of the said statutory regulation, complaints relating to smoking by workers in BMR sites are usually referred to the LD for handling and investigation. However, due to the limited scope of the regulatory regime, the LD would not take any concrete actions (other than provision of advice) following the investigation

or inspection unless flammable liquid or substance is found present at the BMR site.

1069. The Government has amended the relevant laws. With effect from 17 July 2026, clear legal obligations are imposed on principal contractors and subcontractors of construction sites and any persons on construction sites that smoking is prohibited on all construction sites, to reduce fire risks and safeguard the safety of workers and the public.

D3. Specific OSH regulatory regime governing the erection of access doors in the escape staircases made with non-fire-resistant materials

1070. There are a few statutory regulations which may be relevant in governing the erection of access doors in the escape staircases made with non-fire-resistant materials.

1071. First, Regulation 54(1) of the CSSR stipulates that the principal contractor responsible for a construction site shall maintain in good condition and free from obstruction all the means of escape in case of fire and all fire-fighting appliances provided in such construction site. Besides, under Regulation 54(2) of the CSSR, no person shall wilfully alter, damage, obstruct or otherwise impair any such means of escape, or fire-fighting appliance. Failure to comply with Regulation 54(1) of the CSSR by a contractor or Regulation 54(2) by a person is liable to a maximum fine of HK$400,000 and HK$150,000 respectively.

1072. Second, under Regulation 8 of the FIU(SM)R, a proprietor or contractor specified in Schedule 3 shall develop, implement and maintain in respect of the relevant industrial undertaking (including a construction site) a safety management system which contains the elements specified in

Schedule 4 which contains an element of emergency preparedness. Any person who contravenes the provisions of Regulation 8 commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of HK$400,000 and to imprisonment for six months.

D4. Specific OSH regulatory regime governing the use of scaffolding protective nets with non fire-retardant property

1073. The LD also issued the LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety to provide practical guidance for the safe erection and use of bamboo scaffolds to ensure construction site safety.

1074. The LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety was issued by the CL under Section 7A of the FIUO. Pursuant to Sections 7A(4) and (5) of the FIUO, a failure by any person to observe any provision of the LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety shall not of itself cause him or her to incur any criminal liability, but that failure may be taken by a court in criminal proceedings as relevant in determining liability.

1075. This LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety provides practical guidance for the industry to comply with the requirements of the FIUO and the CSSR regarding safety at work involving the erection, substantial addition, alteration, dismantling and use of bamboo scaffolds. The LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety (first edition) was issued by the LD in March 2001, and further revisions had been made from time to time since then.

1076. In the year 2023/2024, the LD commenced work to revise and update the LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety (fourth edition). The BD was consulted on the proposed amendments. In response, the BD

informed the LD that the former had issued the BD 2023 Circular imposing the BD 2023 Standards on the non-fire-retardant property of the scaffolding protective nets, and suggested, amongst other things, that the relevant clauses in the LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety be revised with reference to the same. Having considered the BD's comments, and in the interest of having a set of unified requirements across the relevant Government departments to facilitate the compliance of the industry, Clause 4.4.4(d) was revised to stipulate that protective nets should have appropriate fire-retardant properties in compliance with the BD 2023 Standards. The LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety (fifth edition) was gazetted on 19 April 2024 and took effect on 19 October 2024. Prior to the fifth edition, the previous editions of the LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety did not prescribe any standards in relation to the fire-retardant property of scaffolding protective nets.

1077. The LD takes the view that the BD, as the authority setting the fire-retardant standards for scaffolding protective nets, should also be the authority taking the lead in specifying whether and how checks and inspections, such as fire-retardant test or sample taking of protective nets for testing by recognised laboratories, should be conducted to ensure compliance of the relevant requirement in a coherent manner. The OSOs of the LD would conduct document-checking on the fire-retardant certificates presented to ascertain that the fire-retardant property of the net concerned has met one of the recognised standards as stipulated in the LD Code for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety, if fire is assessed to be a prevailing risk on site or there is any complaint in relation to the fire risk associated with the scaffolding protective nets. However, the LD would not conduct fire-retardant tests or sample taking of protective nets for testing by a recognised laboratory on its own initiative as this falls outside the purview of the LD.

1078. Further, apart from the aforesaid document check, verification of the authenticity of the certificate obtained or presented would not be done by the OSOs unless there is reason to doubt its authenticity, particularly in light of the great number of certificates or reports that the OSOs are required to check pursuant to the OSH legislations in one single inspection of a construction site. Should there be a reason to cast doubt on the authenticity of the certificates during the OSH inspection, complaint or accident investigation, the OSOs would refer the case to the related bureaux or departments, such as the Police, for following up.

D5. Specific OSH regulatory regime governing the use of foam boards to cover the windows of residential units during the execution of BMR works

1079. In respect of the foam boards used to "protect" the windows of the residential units during the execution of BMR works in the external walls, the LD takes the view that its main duty is to administer and enforce the OSH legislations to protect employees' safety and health when they are at work. The LD has no expertise on the fire safety properties of construction materials and other materials associated with construction works, including the fire-retardant properties of scaffolding protective nets or foam boards. The LD usually seeks or relies on the opinion from the other bureaux and departments (such as the BD or the FSD where appropriate) with the related expertise when necessary. When carrying out safety inspection of construction sites, the OSOs mainly target OSH matters.

1080. Having examined the various regulatory regimes relevant to the safety of the Works at WF Court, the Committee will proceed to assess the responsibility of the respective parties for this tragic incident: that of the contractors and the private parties in Chapter 10 and that of the Government bodies in Chapter 11.