

## **Reply from Development Bureau to Request from Independent Committee to Fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po**

This paper aims to provide information to the Independent Committee to the Fire at Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po (the “IC”) in response to the request conveyed by way of letter of 20 January 2026 (the “Request”) from Messrs. Lo & Lo, the solicitors for the IC.

2. In response to an invitation from the IC, a Briefing Session cum Site Visit to two building construction sites of the Architectural Services Department (the “ArchSD”), namely, “Construction of Kindergarten Education Centre at Fu Yee Road, Siu Sai Wan” and “Design and Construction of Kwun Tong Composite Development”, was arranged for the IC and its legal representatives on 15 January 2026, with an aim to studying the adoption of bamboo scaffolding and metal scaffolding in construction industry. The PowerPoint slides presented in the said Briefing Session is at **Annex A**.

3. Subsequently, the IC requested for provision of information and materials arising out of the matters discussed in the Briefing Session and Site Visit. Our responses to the Request are set out below.

**(1) – As discussed during the Briefing Session and the Site Visit, we would be grateful for any statistics your team may have regarding industrial accidents during the construction or dismantling of bamboo scaffolding and metal scaffolding in Hong Kong (together with statistics regarding the overall usage of bamboo scaffolding and metal scaffolding in Hong Kong to enable us to properly compare the two).**

4. Scaffolding is commonly used in new building works and large-scale building maintenance and renovation works, while truss-out scaffolding (「懸空式棚架」並俗稱「飛棚」) is mainly used for small-scale building maintenance and renovation works. According to the information provided by the Labour Department (the “LD”), there were a total of **11 industrial fatalities** arising from accidents during the construction (or termed as “erection” under Construction Sites (Safety) Regulations (Cap. 59I) and relevant codes of practice) or dismantling of bamboo scaffolding from 2021 to 2025, while no accidents involving construction or dismantling of metal scaffolding were recorded during the same period. Amongst the 11 industrial fatalities, 6 were related to bamboo scaffolding; and 5 were related to truss-out bamboo scaffolding. The breakdowns of the annual figures for scaffolding (excluding truss-out

scaffolding) and truss-out scaffolding are shown in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively below. For the avoidance of doubt, the figures in both Table 1 and Table 2 do not include industrial fatalities arising from the use of scaffolding during the works or otherwise.

Table 1 – The annual number of industrial fatalities arising from accidents during the construction or dismantling of scaffolding for large-scale building maintenance and renovation works from 2021 to 2025

| <b>Year</b>                                                              | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> | <b>2025<sup>Note</sup></b> | <b>Total</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Bamboo scaffolding (excluding truss-out scaffolding – see Table 2 below) | Nil         | 3           | Nil         | 1           | 2                          | <b>6</b>     |
| Metal scaffolding                                                        | Nil         | Nil         | Nil         | Nil         | Nil                        | <b>Nil</b>   |

Note: Provisional figure as at 20 January 2026.

Table 2 – The annual number of industrial fatalities during the construction or dismantling of truss-out bamboo scaffolding for small-scale building maintenance and renovation works from 2021 to 2025

| <b>Year</b>                  | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> | <b>2025<sup>Note</sup></b> | <b>Total</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Truss-out bamboo scaffolding | 3           | 1           | Nil         | 1           | Nil                        | <b>5</b>     |

Note: Provisional figure as at 20 January 2026.

5. The LD advised that they do not keep specific statistics on non-fatal industrial accidents during the construction or dismantling of bamboo scaffolding and metal scaffolding in Hong Kong, and has practical difficulty in compiling such statistics based on its record. The LD receives an average of over 30 000 statutory accident notification forms<sup>1</sup> (including fatal and non-fatal accidents) annually, many of which relate to non-industrial accidents or minor accidents such as slips, trips or lifting injuries. Unlike industrial (as well as non-industrial) fatalities, which are subject to comprehensive investigations by the LD under an established mechanism to ascertain their causes and the liability of duty holders, not every non-fatal accident is investigated by the LD due to its operational constraints. In relation to accidents involving scaffolding, the LD advised

<sup>1</sup> Under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (Cap. 282), the employer requires to report to the LD of an accident occurs at a workplace causing death or total or partial incapacity of the employee for a period exceeding 3 days using prescribed statutory notification forms.

that it is operationally not feasible to classify them in such a way as to allow one to ascertain whether bamboo or metal scaffolding was involved and what scaffolding work was being carried out in a particular accident, and for this reason the same was not done. Furthermore, employers may not provide sufficient details in the statutory accident notification forms for identifying the involvement and work progress of scaffolding in an accident.

6. On the statistics regarding the overall usage of bamboo scaffolding and metal scaffolding in Hong Kong, albeit “scaffold” is defined in the Cap. 59I, the LD advised that the contractors are not required to report to the LD on the types of scaffolding adopted. The Buildings Department (the “BD”) also advised that scaffolding is not required to be shown on prescribed plans under the Building (Administration) Regulations (Cap. 123A). No approval of plans and consent for commencement of works by the BD are required for construction of scaffolding. As such, the LD and BD do not have statistics on the overall usage of bamboo and metal scaffolding in Hong Kong.

7. In respect of public works building projects, ArchSD advised that around 80% of new buildings public works contracts adopt bamboo scaffolding, and almost all of the large-scale building maintenance and renovation works undertaken by them adopt bamboo scaffolding.

**(2) – At the Briefing Session, your team referred to certain technical papers on the relative fire retardant performance of bamboo and metal scaffolding. We would be grateful if you could provide us with a copy of those technical papers. If your team has any other technical papers or research materials regarding the relative performance of bamboo and metal scaffolding (e.g. strength, durability, resistance to extreme weather conditions and so on) we would also be grateful for copies of the same.**

8. The written technical advice in respect of the material strengths of structural bamboo and structural steel at elevated temperatures provided by Ir Prof CHUNG Kwok Fai of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Hong Kong Polytechnic University is attached at **Annex B** for the IC’s perusal. According to the said advice, the strength of bamboo will be reduced by half when the temperature is around 60 to 100°C whereas the strength of steel will be reduced by half when the temperature reaches 500 to 550°C.

**(3) – We understand from the Briefing Session that metal scaffolds**

typically require bulkier supporting frames relative to bamboo scaffolds due to their heavier weight. We would be grateful if you could elaborate on the feasibility or otherwise of using metal scaffolding in large-scale building maintenance and renovation works (given that such buildings would typically be in an aged condition) based on currently available technology. Furthermore, if DevB and ArchSD have any statistics regarding the use of metal scaffolding in building maintenance and renovation works specifically, we would be grateful for such information.

9. Many old buildings in Hong Kong have limited spaces between the building external walls and lot boundary, and the aged conditions and structural capacities of these building external walls are also a cause of concern. Generally speaking, both types of scaffolding are feasible for adoption in large-scale building maintenance and renovation works, subject to further assessment on the following factors –

(a) Structural implication of aged buildings

Metal scaffolds are much heavier than bamboo scaffolds and there is a limit on their self-standing height, typically not more than 30 metres, without additional vertical supports in the form of structural brackets from the parent building structures. Aged buildings higher than 30 metres may lack the required structural capacity to bear these intermediate vertical supports of the heavier metal scaffolds, in particular for those with dilapidated external walls. The use of metal scaffolds in large-scale maintenance and renovation works in buildings over 30 metres high will be feasible if the structural condition of the buildings is found adequate.

(b) Adaptability in narrow spaces

Bamboo scaffolds, having high flexibility and light weight, are typically more adaptable for maintenance / repair works where the work spaces are limited, as well as in buildings of irregular shapes or with unique architectural features. Its comparatively lightweight also facilitates manual transportation and assembly in narrow streets/lanes/spaces, which are not uncommon in Hong Kong.

10. On the statistics regarding the use of scaffolding in large-scale building maintenance and renovation works, please refer to paragraph 7 above.

**(4) – We understand from the Briefing Session and Site Visit that there are currently no regulations or guidelines requiring (i) the fastenings of bamboo members, (ii) walkways used on working platforms, and (iii) toe-boards to meet any particular standards of fire resistance. We would be grateful if you could confirm whether DevB and ArchSD consider that such regulations and guidelines should be introduced and if so whether there are any commercially available/practicable materials for fastening bamboo members.**

11. The LD and BD advised that there are currently no regulations or guidelines requiring (i) the fastenings of bamboo members, (ii) walkways used on working platforms, and (iii) toe-boards, to meet any particular standards of fire resistance. However, it is the BD's view that, while the integrity and stability of the bamboo scaffolds depend on the fastenings of bamboo members, as well as the members itself, the materials used for walkways and toe boards are considered to be more relevant to the overall fire retardancy of the scaffold system due to their extensive coverage and inter-connectivity with the scaffold members. Therefore, imposing fire retardant/resistance requirements on the materials used for walkways and toe boards would further enhance safety in case of fire as they help slow down the propagation of fire.

12. As announced by the Government at the Legislative Council meeting on 14 January 2026, the LD is reviewing the codes of practice related to scaffolding, with the aim of specifying the material requirements for toe-boards<sup>2</sup> to ensure the materials used are of sufficient strength to prevent workers and objects from falling from scaffolds (such as thick metal or wood boards), which can also reduce the risk of fire. The LD advised that, with regard to the boards and planks used to form working platforms, the existing law<sup>3</sup> has stipulated that they shall be not less than 25 millimetres in thicknesses if they are 200 millimetres in width, and not less than 50 millimetres in thicknesses if they are 150 millimetres. This requirement is to ensure that scaffold boards and planks are of sound construction and adequate strength to ensure the occupational safety of employees working at heights.

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<sup>2</sup> The primary function of toe-boards is to prevent workers and objects from falling from scaffolds. Pursuant to regulation 38B and the Third Schedule of Cap. 59I, the height of a toe-board or other similar barrier shall be not less than 200 millimetres. Paragraph 4.4.1(c)(ii) of the Code of Practice for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety also stipulates that toe-boards shall be of good construction, adequate strength and thickness to serve as working platforms on bamboo scaffolds.

<sup>3</sup> The Third Schedule of Cap. 59I.

13. On the material for fastening members of the bamboo scaffolding, having exchanged with industry stakeholders after the Site Visit, we gather that there are currently no commercially available and practical fire retardant materials for fastening members of the bamboo scaffolding.

14. The above are provided for consideration by the IC. Should the IC require further information, please feel free to let us know.

**Development Bureau**  
**February 2026**