

INDEPENDENT COMMITTEE
IN RELATION TO THE FIRE
AT WANG FUK COURT IN TAI PO

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MR HO KIN YIP

I, HO Kin Yip, a former Director of Prestige Construction & Engineering Co., Limited, of Room 801-802, 8/F., Laurels Industrial Centre, 32 Tai Yau Street, San Po Kong, Kowloon, Hong Kong, do say as follows: -

Background

1. On 2 March 2026, I provided to your Committee my first witness statement containing the information available to me at that time. I rely upon the first witness statement as the background to this witness statement.
2. On 28 May 2026, the Committee has written to me and asked if I wish to make my response to certain criticisms raised during the evidential hearing. I wish to do so and I shall respond to the criticisms raised in the following paragraphs.

3. Since then, I have been charged with one count of Manslaughter, and the matter has been brought before the court on 10 June 2026. I understand that, as a man facing criminal charges, I have the right to remain silent. Yet I understand that your Esteemed Committee is, by its very nature, tasked only with bringing matters to light. Though the burdens of the criminal accusation before me hang heavy, I am resolved to meet my duty by assisting your Committee.
4. I was not granted bail in respect of my manslaughter charge. Since then, I have been remanded at Lai Chi Kok Detention Centre. In those circumstances, I have not had access to any digital files or documents with which to prepare or refine this witness statement.

Origin of the Fire:

5. I am aware that the Committee has traced the first appearance of the fire back to CCTV footage from CCTV cameras operating in the external terraces (light wells) on the first floor in one of the buildings of Wang Fuk Court,. The footage is said to have recorded conversation about smoking at or near the origin of the fire that is the light well of one of the building.
6. I also understand that there was evidence shown indicating that the light wells where the fire has started had been piled up with rubbish.
7. Taken together, this, the existence of flammable rubbish along with onsite smoking, may have contributed to the starting of the fire.
8. My response, to start with, is that it was never our policy to turn a blind eye to smoking in our construction site. It is our common practice that banners and

notices have been set forth throughout the precincts of the work to remind all who labour there that the indulgence of smoke is forbidden within our bounds.

9. As far as I was aware, our company maintains a system of penalties, under which a fine is imposed upon any workman discovered to have broken this prohibition upon the premises. Usually, those workmen caught with smoking a cigarette upon the site will be posed with a fine of HK\$2,000. This system is not a vain show. As far as I understand, this rule is put into effect with resolute hand and observed in practice.
10. Of these matters, I may also relate to particular instances in my memories that in graver cases of repeated offenders where workers who were discovered committing the same breach of smoking onsite were dismissed from their employment.
11. Similarly, the keeping of highly flammable materials in the Light Wells were strictly forbidden as a company policy. This prohibition does not only apply to the light wells, but to the construction site as a whole. The presence of rubbish, be it flammable or not, anywhere upon the site, is subject to our prohibitions and must be controlled in accordance with our rules.
12. With due candour, I must also explain that the prohibition against smoking and keeping common areas free of flammable objects, are internal rules governing worker conduct, operate principally as regulatory and managerial measures.
13. As the manager of the project, I would certainly hope to eliminate any onsite smoking, and to see all areas including those light-wells are kept clean, free of

rubbish and unnecessary items. In practice, it is not possible for the company to supervise every single worker at every moment to ascertain precisely where they rest or how they comport themselves. The oversight of a worksite is labour-intensive and therefore imperfect.

14. Regrettably, some workers, and in particular those supplied by outsourcing agencies, do not always observe the site rules. I have heard that many of them, who are not our employee, do smoke.
15. At the same time, in terms of flammable items in the Light Wells, as the manager of the project, I must be fair to the realities of construction work. It is sometimes necessary for materials and building related items to be present in the vicinity while workers install and complete their tasks. I have heard that many of them, who were not our employee, left personal effects untidily about the place.
16. While I endeavour to maintain standards and to enforce compliance, the conduct of certain individuals especially subcontractor's workers, who at times pay little heed to our instructions, made complete enforcement extremely difficult. I record these facts honestly and without excuse.
17. I must stress that I was not aware that these light wells had been used by workmen as a place of rest, or for the indulgence of smoke. Personally, I have never stayed in the light wells for long, and I never observed or noticed how workers were using them.

Dysfunction of Fire-Protection Systems

18. I understand that, during the hearing, evidence was presented indicating that the fire alarm systems had been turned off, and that the fire hydrant or hose reel systems were not functioning.
19. I have in the past received no report to my attention indicating that the fire-protection systems were not functioning.
20. My understanding was that the main switch for the fire alarm system was located within the fire service pump room. That pump room remained under the control and care of the management office of Wang Fuk Court, and out of the control of our employees.
21. I was aware that our company had engaged the services of 天虹工程有限公司 and 中華發展工程有限公司, each a duly registered and licensed fire safety contractor, to undertake the inspection, maintenance, and repair of the fire safety installations and equipment at Wang Fuk Court.
22. We had full confidence in their work at the time. Those firms bore responsibility for the operation of the relevant systems and for any repairs to the fire hydrant and hose reel systems.
23. Throughout the course of the works, it was a matter of constant knowledge to me that the fire alarm apparatus were standing by and were in full working order. Again, to the best of my recollection, no report was ever brought to my attention indicating that the alarms were not functioning.

24. I must emphasise that the keys to the room containing the fire alarm systems were retained by the management office. When access to the pump room was required by our workmen, they were obliged to notify the management office, which would open the door and provide an attendant.
25. Furthermore, whenever our personnel entered the pump room, they did so accompanied by a member of the management office staff.
26. On the other hand, so far as I know, if any works by 天虹工程有限公司 and 中華發展工程有限公司 required the temporary disconnection of the fire hydrant or hose reel systems, the established practice is that the Fire Department must first be notified and their approval obtained.
27. I received no notice indicating that either the fire hydrant or the hose reel systems needed to be turned off, nor the Fire Department had been notified.
28. In response to concerns raised regarding mismanagement of fire fighting practices by our company, we took proactive steps to strengthen fire safety by procuring and supplying good quality fire extinguishers for each level of Wang Fuk Court.
29. For completeness, I have previously attached the inspection reports (HKY-4) prepared before the outbreak of the fire. None of those reports recorded any defect or failure in the fire hydrant or hose reel systems.

Existence of Flammable Materials

30. I am aware that criticisms were made against us, namely that certain building related materials on site were flammable. These materials mainly include scaffolding nets and foam boards used on the outside of the building.
31. First of all, the scaffolding nets were supplied and installed by 盈利豐棚業, a firm of good repute and with sufficient experience in large scale construction undertakings.
32. I currently do not have the procurement records to trace the origin of these green scaffolding nets. They were purchased in several separate batches by 盈利豐棚業. A replacement was required after the typhoon in July, and another replacement took place after the second typhoon in October.
33. Since the later batches were replacement-only for limited areas that were damaged, I am not in a position to state what percentage of the nets came from the first, second, and third batches. I believe that the first batch constituted the largest proportion. As far as I am aware, the majority of the scaffolding nets were of high quality and were priced above the level of standard products. As I have provided earlier in HKY-8, we have been provided with a safety certificate of the netting provided to us from our supplier.
34. On the other hand, the foam boards were procured by our subcontractor New Nam Fong Construction Limited, a firm of good repute and with sufficient experience in large scale construction undertakings.

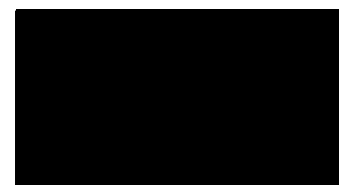
35. The subcontractor assumed responsibility for the purchase of foam boards because the precise quantity required could only be ascertained after the works had commenced.
36. As far as I understand, the foam boards procured by the subcontractor were of high quality and were priced above the level of standard products.
37. It is not foreseeable to me that these materials themselves were the source of the fire.
38. As I am aware, it is our company policy to conduct tests on representative samples in order to verify their resistance to flame. At the time, those tests gave no cause for alarm.
39. As shown in HKY-8, we were provided by our supplier with videos of testing of the scaffolding netting materials. In the footage, the scaffolding netting materials did not show signs of flammability. I therefore believed the nets were tested and the results of which gave no cause for alarm.
40. Similarly, upon receipt of the foam boards, I understand employees took representative samples and carried out tests to confirm their resistance to fire. I myself viewed a recording of those tests. In the footage, the samples did not ignite. Even after they were severed and exposed, the boards did not show signs of flammability. Similarly, the results gave no cause for alarm.
41. If the Committee concludes that these materials did ignite, then such combustibility would have been, to me, an unexpected result, contrary to the assurances provided by the sampling and testing procedures our company employed.

42. Prior to the incident, I had received no complaints indicating that materials in use were combustible. Accordingly, I was not aware that the scaffolding nets and foam boards used at Wang Fuk Court were combustible at all.

Conclusion

43. As a director, I verily believe that my company conducted itself to a standard higher than those prevailing within the industry at the material time, in the management of safety for the construction project. While I am deeply distressed by the loss of life and the damages arising from this tragedy, I was not aware at the time of any obvious deficiencies or shortcomings in our procedures.
44. If I am able to provide further answers to assist the Committee, I would be grateful to do so.

Dated this the 2nd day of July 2026



HO KIN YIP

Former Director of

Prestige Construction &
Engineering Co., Limited