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1 Thursday, 19 March 2026  
 2 (10.00 am)  
 3 CHAIRMAN: Today is the start of the evidential hearing of  
 4 the Independent Committee in relation to the fire at  
 5 Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po. Today is 19 March.  
 6 Three months ago, the Independent Committee started  
 7 its work and convened the first meeting. Over the three  
 8 months, the Committee and their legal team has done  
 9 a large volume of work in preparation for today's  
 10 hearing. We sought information from government  
 11 departments, non-government organisations and  
 12 individuals. They were given a short time, but it was  
 13 a reasonable period of time for them to furnish  
 14 information to the Committee.  
 15 Parties have submitted witness statements,  
 16 information and documents. Afterwards, the Committee  
 17 and the legal team had to scrutinise the information  
 18 supplied, sought clarification before a decision was  
 19 made as to whether further information was needed from  
 20 these parties.  
 21 During the three months, we had to provide time for  
 22 government departments to complete their investigations.  
 23 We have made arrangements for the expert of the  
 24 Committee to look into the cause as well as the speed of  
 25 the fire.

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1 There are also other work included. This is an open  
 2 hearing. We had to make arrangements for those affected  
 3 by the Wang Fuk Court fire, as well as other members of  
 4 the public, to provide information if they wished.  
 5 In addition, we had to deal with applications for  
 6 involved parties. We also had to make detailed  
 7 arrangements for the conduct of the evidential hearing.  
 8 I can go so far as to say that, given the complexity and  
 9 the extensive scope of the incident, compared to similar  
 10 investigations within and outside Hong Kong, to convene  
 11 an evidential hearing in just three months' time is no  
 12 mean feat. As we all know, we have to submit a report  
 13 to the Chief Executive in nine months. Nine months is  
 14 a very progressive target. It took seven years for the  
 15 report of Grenfell Tower to be submitted. As you  
 16 understand, there is urgency, given the timeframe.  
 17 First, we have to, as soon as possible, give an  
 18 account to the families of the deceased as well as those  
 19 who have been affected so that they will know why their  
 20 loved ones have perished. Secondly, given the age of  
 21 the majority of buildings in Hong Kong, there will be  
 22 a large number of renovation and maintenance work  
 23 pending. These works have been put on hold. They have  
 24 to wait for the result of the investigation before they  
 25 can proceed, so there is an urgency of our

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1 investigation.  
 2 Thirdly, we have to furnish our report to the  
 3 government as soon as possible so that they can take up  
 4 the follow-up work. The follow-up work includes  
 5 reforms, as well as deals with staff issues. We think  
 6 it is in the interest of the public to make a report to  
 7 the Chief Executive as soon as possible.  
 8 Having said that, the investigation has to be  
 9 comprehensive, so all parties will have to complete  
 10 their works within a very short time. That includes our  
 11 legal team, parties under investigation, involved  
 12 parties and all parties that are required to furnish  
 13 information. We apply the same standard to everyone,  
 14 including ourselves, that is, to complete the work as  
 15 soon as possible.  
 16 We thank you for your understanding and your  
 17 patience. We thank you for your cooperation so this  
 18 evidential hearing can take place within such a short  
 19 time.  
 20 Given the short timeframe, the supply of information  
 21 and documents may not have completed. That is the case  
 22 in past hearings and inquiries as well. So in relation  
 23 to the arrangements of the evidential hearings as to the  
 24 list of witnesses and when they will testify is yet to  
 25 be finalised. However, these matters will be finalised

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1 when the hearing is in progress. As soon the details  
 2 are ironed out, we will make the information public.  
 3 Given the extensive scope of the investigation, there  
 4 are a large number of witnesses involved. We have yet  
 5 to finalise the list of witnesses. We have to make sure  
 6 that the investigation is comprehensive. However, we  
 7 have identified duplications in witnesses. We aim to  
 8 consolidate the information that is duplicated, to speed  
 9 up the progress.  
 10 The hearing will cover all aspects, that is  
 11 including the two areas in the directional conference:  
 12 first, the cause of the fire, the rapid spread of the  
 13 fire, as well as relevant liabilities.  
 14 The second part of the terms of reference is whether  
 15 there are untoward conduct, as well as bid-rigging, in  
 16 large-scale building maintenance and renovation works.  
 17 We have completed the public consultation under the  
 18 first paragraph of the terms of reference. That for the  
 19 second paragraph will start soon. Information will be  
 20 published in due course.  
 21 In relation to the second part, relevant law  
 22 enforcement agencies have submitted reports on whether  
 23 there is bid-rigging behaviour as well as untoward  
 24 conduct in large-scale building maintenance in  
 25 Hong Kong. There may be implications and consequences,

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<p>1 say, for example, possible criminal prosecutions.</p> <p>2 The report I mentioned will be made public. We will</p> <p>3 hear from the parties. We will arrive at a preliminary</p> <p>4 consideration before we map out the approach of the</p> <p>5 second part of the terms of reference.</p> <p>6 Our legal team, as well as representatives of the</p> <p>7 involved parties, will make their opening addresses. We</p> <p>8 will start with our legal team. We understand that</p> <p>9 their opening address will be quite lengthy. They will</p> <p>10 cover the evidence that we have at hand. We agree with</p> <p>11 this approach. We think that after the public is</p> <p>12 apprised of the evidence we have at hand, it will be</p> <p>13 conducive to the conduct of the hearing that follows.</p> <p>14 We have to find the truth.</p> <p>15 In the process, some evidence may cause uneasiness</p> <p>16 to members of the public, including the families that</p> <p>17 are affected. However, the evidence is deemed necessary</p> <p>18 because it helps us to understand what happened in the</p> <p>19 different blocks as well as how the fire spread.</p> <p>20 We have given directions to the legal team to make</p> <p>21 arrangements in relation to the evidence. Videos may be</p> <p>22 presented in the form of photographs. We will pixelate</p> <p>23 the identities of the persons shown in these images.</p> <p>24 Still, we think that no matter what arrangements we have</p> <p>25 put in place, it will cause discomfort to certain</p>	<p>1 Opening submissions by MR DAWES</p> <p>2 MR DAWES: Thank you, chairman and two members.</p> <p>3 On 26 November 2025, we saw the fire at</p> <p>4 Wang Fuk Court. It is one of the gravest tragedies that</p> <p>5 has occurred in Hong Kong. It was the deadliest fire in</p> <p>6 Hong Kong since 1948. The fire burned for over 43 hours</p> <p>7 and engulfed seven apartment blocks. A total of</p> <p>8 160 people lost their lives and more than 4,000</p> <p>9 residents were displaced from their homes.</p> <p>10 In the months since the fire, the whole of Hong Kong</p> <p>11 and people from other parts of the world have mourned</p> <p>12 those who have lost their lives. The tragedy has left</p> <p>13 a permanent scar in our collective memories.</p> <p>14 The scale of the fire is so astounding that we find</p> <p>15 it difficult to fathom why it would happen in Hong Kong.</p> <p>16 How come that the fire-fighting appliances could not do</p> <p>17 their work and who made the decisions and approvals in</p> <p>18 relation to supervision? How come the series of</p> <p>19 failures by contractors and consultants were not</p> <p>20 detected by government departments?</p> <p>21 Members of the public and survivors expect answers.</p> <p>22 They expect the work of the Committee will clarify</p> <p>23 matters, hold those who are accountable accountable and</p> <p>24 find the truth. We should not let such tragedy occur</p> <p>25 again.</p>
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<p>1 parties. That is something that we try to minimise, but</p> <p>2 it is inevitable. We ask for your understanding. If</p> <p>3 necessary, please seek professional help.</p> <p>4 The Committee fully understands that those who have</p> <p>5 been affected, the surviving family members, have high</p> <p>6 expectations of the Committee. They expect the</p> <p>7 Committee to conduct the hearing to find the truth in an</p> <p>8 open, fair and transparent manner. Given the</p> <p>9 seriousness of the fire, the fact that many lives have</p> <p>10 perished in the fire, we do think that these</p> <p>11 expectations are reasonable.</p> <p>12 We have made difficult decisions. The investigation</p> <p>13 has to be comprehensive. At the same time, we want the</p> <p>14 hearing to be conducted efficiently. We will be open,</p> <p>15 fair and impartial. We will do our best to complete our</p> <p>16 investigation. These are the principles we will abide</p> <p>17 by.</p> <p>18 That is what I'd like to say before we start the</p> <p>19 hearing.</p> <p>20 I now give the floor to our team and the involved</p> <p>21 parties for their opening addresses. We will start with</p> <p>22 the leading counsel of the Independent Committee,</p> <p>23 Mr Victor Dawes SC, to give his opening address.</p> <p>24</p> <p>25</p>	<p>1 The fire reminds us there are fire risks littered in</p> <p>2 buildings in Hong Kong. You don't find other places</p> <p>3 with as many skyscrapers in Hong Kong. There are</p> <p>4 millions of people who live in buildings that are</p> <p>5 wrapped in green scaffolding net over a very long time,</p> <p>6 months or even years.</p> <p>7 The Wang Fuk Court fire is an alarm for us. It</p> <p>8 forces us to take a serious look at the deep-seated</p> <p>9 problems in large-scale renovation and repair work of</p> <p>10 buildings. The community should learn from this</p> <p>11 tragedy. The process may be difficult and</p> <p>12 heart-breaking, but we do need to face these difficult</p> <p>13 issues seriously in order to move ahead.</p> <p>14 On 22 December 2005, the Chief Executive made</p> <p>15 a decision to set up the Independent Committee to carry</p> <p>16 out an investigation. In the directional hearing,</p> <p>17 a conference on 5 February this year, they have set out</p> <p>18 the approach. In short, the terms of reference of the</p> <p>19 Committee is to look at the cause of the fire and the</p> <p>20 reasons for the casualties and property damage. The</p> <p>21 second one is to look at whether there are widespread</p> <p>22 systemic problems in the building maintenance and</p> <p>23 renovation sector. The third and fourth paragraphs</p> <p>24 concern the adequacy of existing regulations and</p> <p>25 penalties and make recommendations for reform.</p>

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<p>1 The work of the Committee is ongoing in tandem with                  2 criminal investigations. A public inquiry is not                  3 a place to find criminal or civil liabilities. Those                  4 are under the purview of law enforcement agencies. If                  5 prosecutions are initiated, it will be for the criminal                  6 court to decide whether they are guilty or not. That                  7 point is stressed in the terms of reference. It sets                  8 out that the criminal liabilities are not in the terms                  9 of reference of the Committee. We fully understand that                  10 we should not interfere with any prosecution efforts as                  11 well as criminal investigations. We do not want our                  12 investigation to have any impact on parties involved in                  13 criminal or civil litigations, or that they can make use                  14 of our inquiries to get away from the law.</p> <p>15 We will make use of the hearing to ask questions of                  16 witnesses, experts, and give them a chance to speak.</p> <p>17 Let me pause here because we have to sort out some                  18 technical issues.</p> <p>19 The Committee is fully supported by the legal team,                  20 as well as the Secretariat, in collecting information.                  21 The Committee has sent letters to ask for information as                  22 well as documents. You can imagine that the volume of                  23 information/documents received is significant. We have                  24 received over a million informations, including photos,                  25 documents and videos. The data collected exceeds</p>	<p>1 eight blocks of buildings, the fire alarm systems for                  2 seven of the blocks have been deactivated. The failure                  3 has delayed the alarm sound to residents and greatly                  4 shortened the time for residents to evacuate.</p> <p>5 Second, staircase and corridors. The windows of the                  6 staircases and corridors had been removed to create                  7 access for workers to climb in and out of the buildings.                  8 These open accesses allowed smoke and fire to spread                  9 into the staircases which are escape routes for                  10 residents. It also caused rapid spread of the same in                  11 the staircases, and trapped a lot of residents.</p> <p>12 Three, fire hose reels and main switch. Ordinarily,                  13 the suspension cannot be longer than 14 days. However,                  14 the contractors have applied for repeated deactivation                  15 of the hose reels and the fire main switch, lasting for                  16 several months.</p> <p>17 Four, combustible materials on the scaffoldings and                  18 on the windows. The evidence shows that there were                  19 a lot of combustible materials placed on the                  20 scaffoldings and the windows, especially after the                  21 typhoon. Some fire-retardant scaffolding net has been                  22 replaced with non-fire-retardant one. The                  23 fire-retardant nets required by the law have not been                  24 used in many places, and the windows were covered by                  25 foam boards which might have caused spread of fire into</p>
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<p>1 1 terabyte. The information covers CCTV footage from                  2 the day of the fire, material seized from management                  3 office as well as complaints lodged by residents to                  4 government departments.</p> <p>5 Responses from government to residents' complaints                  6 is also supplied to us, in addition to internal records.                  7 The information and documents we have received also                  8 cover information from contractors, property management                  9 companies, messages within contractors, including                  10 WhatsApp messages.</p> <p>11 It is confirmed that the scaffolding net used at the                  12 site was not fire-resistant. We have also, from                  13 hundreds of firefighters, security guards, workers,                  14 police officers, statements, hundreds of them. We have                  15 sufficient information to find out the truth and facts                  16 about the fire. The Committee will fully consider all                  17 the information as well as the evidence supplied before                  18 arriving at its findings.</p> <p>19 Despite so, we can say with confidence that                  20 according to the existing evidence, on the day of the                  21 fire, almost all life-protecting fire safety appliances                  22 failed because of human errors. Failures have taken                  23 place on the following aspects, some of which have been                  24 reported by the media before.</p> <p>25 Say, for example, the fire alarm system. Among the</p>	<p>1 the flats.</p> <p>2 Finally, smoking on the construction site. There is                  3 evidence showing that there were construction workers                  4 smoking on the flat roof as well as the scaffoldings.                  5 There were cigarette butts left at these locations, and                  6 also, repeated complaints from residents were not met                  7 with positive responses.</p> <p>8 At this stage I would like to stress that the cause                  9 of the fire, the spread of the fire as well as the                  10 significant damage caused, according to our evidence on                  11 hand, this is the result of a number of factors. We                  12 will explore the individual factor leading to the damage                  13 in the subsequent expert testimony.</p> <p>14 Chairman, members, in the following I will brief                  15 members on the background of the Wang Fuk Court. You                  16 might have known this information already, but I would                  17 like to repeat the background all the same.</p> <p>18 It was built in 1983 by the Housing Authority. It                  19 is located on the reclaimed areas near the river, near                  20 the Tolo Highway, and to the north there is Kwong Fuk                  21 Estate and also a public school established by the                  22 Baptist Church and to the south it is connected to the                  23 Tolo Highway.</p> <p>24 Wang Fuk Court consists of eight blocks.                  25 Anticlockwise, they are block A, Wang Yan House, Wang</p>

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<p>1 Tao House, Wang Sun House, Wang Kin House, Wang Tai 2 House, Wang Cheong House, Wang Shing House and block H, 3 Wang Chi House. They are all 31 storeys tall, with 4 eight blocks on each floor. Altogether there are 1,394 5 flats.</p> <p>6 As you can see from the layout, the design of the 7 buildings is very similar. Wang Cheong House is where 8 the fire started. We are going to see a 3D models 9 created by the City University for Wang Cheong House. 10 The 3D model is built upon the building plan. It may 11 not be an exact replica of the reality, but after paying 12 a site visit we find that the 3D model is accurate.</p> <p>13 So this is a U-shaped corridor. In the middle, 14 there are three elevators serving all floors. There are 15 two scissor staircases. Both staircases connect the 16 31st floor to the ground floor, but only one of them 17 connects to the rooftop. The lobby is in the middle of 18 the ground floor. There are switch rooms, as well as 19 bicycle parking spaces. There is one staircase leading 20 to the lobby; the other one leads to the back of the 21 building. Towards the right of the building there is 22 a pump room and also there is a fire pump room in front 23 of the main entrance.</p> <p>24 It is worth noting that there are four light wells 25 surrounding each block building. They are located</p>	<p>1 24 tender documents were received. The tender price 2 ranged from HK\$88,000 to \$1.08 million. Will Power 3 submitted a tender at \$220,000. It was the sixth lowest 4 bid. But, in the end, 67.5 per cent of the voters voted 5 for Will Power.</p> <p>6 The maintenance work took place between March to 7 August 2019. The report was submitted in November by 8 Will Power, suggesting a number of maintenance works for 9 Wang Fuk Court.</p> <p>10 On 11 December 2021, at the extraordinary general 11 meeting, the IO voted to appoint Will Power Architects 12 as the consultant and put them in charge of engaging 13 contractors and managing the maintenance work.</p> <p>14 Now, after the tendering process, 35 tender 15 documents were received. The tender price ranged from 16 HK\$45,000 to HK\$2.28 million. The tender price 17 submitted by Will Power was \$308,000. It was the 11th 18 lowest and in the end it received 55.69 per cent of 19 votes in support of Will Power.</p> <p>20 Between 2022 and May 2023, with the support of IO, 21 Will Power Architects drafted the tender documents for 22 the maintenance work of Wang Fuk Court.</p> <p>23 In July 2023, 37 tender documents were received. 24 Tender price ranged from HK\$22.2 million to 25 HK\$297.9 million.</p>
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<p>1 between the buildings and there is a flat roof on the 2 first floor of the light well. The flat roof is closed 3 off via a metal gate.</p> <p>4 Later on we will explain how we suspect that the 5 fire started on the flat roof outside flats 104 and 105 6 of Wang Cheong House.</p> <p>7 We're now going to play video footage created from 8 the 3D model to show you the location of the light well.</p> <p>9 From the perspective of the fire, on both sides of 10 the light well, those are flats 104 and 105.</p> <p>11 According to the latest census data in 2021, there 12 are some 4,600 residents in Wang Fuk Court. More than 13 one-third of them, some 1,700 of them, are about the age 14 of 65. Some 420 residents are aged below 14.</p> <p>15 In the following, I will explain how the maintenance 16 work of Wang Fuk Court started. In June 2016, the 17 Incorporated Owners of Wang Fuk Court received an order 18 from the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme, MBIS, 19 requiring the IO to engage a registered examiner to 20 inspect the building structure of the eight blocks of 21 buildings and also a contractor must be engaged to 22 conduct post-examination maintenance work.</p> <p>23 On 25 January 2019, the IO convened a meeting and 24 voted to engage Will Power Architects Co Ltd as the 25 registered examiner. During the tender exercise,</p>	<p>1 On 28 January 2024, at the extraordinary general 2 meeting, the IO appointed Prestige Construction 3 &amp; Engineering Co Ltd, with some 54 per cent of votes. 4 The tender procedures, as far as the appointment of 5 Prestige Construction, have caused a lot of controversy 6 among the residents.</p> <p>7 Later on, in the realm of paragraph 2 of the terms 8 of reference, we will explore this issue, but that will 9 probably be on the third day of the evidential hearing.</p> <p>10 The maintenance work of Wang Fuk Court started in 11 June 2024. The final contract price was HK\$336 million. 12 On average, each flat had to bear \$170,000. The 13 scaffolding was erected for the eight blocks of 14 buildings in June 2024.</p> <p>15 I will now recap the happenings on the day of the 16 fire. As mentioned by the Chairman, it may cause 17 discomfort for some of you in the public. The 18 Secretariat has assigned a psychologist to provide 19 assistance in the building. If you need any assistance, 20 please alert our staff.</p> <p>21 Before we look at the evidence, there are two issues 22 which I would like to bring your attention to. First, 23 the fire first started at the external wall. That's 24 a facade fire. The technical term is "facade fire". 25 The fire started at the scaffolding on the facade and</p>

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<p>1 spread inside the building. In other words, fire and 2 smoke spread into the building from outside. 3 The second point, which is also very unfortunate, 4 the fire spread rapidly from the first building block to 5 the other blocks. From the evidence, you can see how 6 the fire spread from the first building all the way to 7 the other six blocks of buildings. 8 On 26 November last year, Wang Fuk Court residents 9 were going about their lives as usual and construction 10 workers continued with the maintenance work at 11 Wang Fuk Court as usual. The painting work, as well as 12 other repair work, inside the buildings were more or 13 less completed. Tiling, replacement of tiles on the 14 facade was in progress. 15 On that day, the weather was extremely dry. There 16 was some mild wind, but by 3 pm the humidity level was 17 40 per cent, the wind was blowing from the southeastern 18 side and the wind speed was at 40 kilometres per hour. 19 There was a fire alert issued by the Observatory. 20 The first fire alert was issued at 2.45 pm. 21 According to CCTV footage, some objects fell from the 22 back of block F to the ground. 23 This is CCTV number 4 on Wang Cheong House, which is 24 represented by the red circle. We have reviewed the 25 CCTV from this angle. We suggest you cast your</p>	<p>1 time. There is no sound to the video footage, but from 2 another video recorded by CCTV camera installed by the 3 contractor on the 5th floor, it comes with sound. So we 4 will now pay attention to the video with sound on. We 5 start from 14:42:55. 6 (Video played) 7 And then we will fast-forward to 14:45:10 and you 8 can hear cries from the residents and you can also see 9 flames on the camera. 10 (Video played) 11 We will replay the most important part of the video. 12 (Video played) 13 From the sound recording, we could speculate that 14 the fire broke out between 14:42 and 14:45. It was 15 discovered by workers. It also coincided with the 16 evidence given by one of the workers, Mr Cheng Shek Wan, 17 and when we look at the cause of the fire we will look 18 at Mr Cheng's evidence again. 19 The next video-recording was recorded at 14:50:43, 20 made by a passerby, Mr Yip Fai. In fact this has gone 21 viral on internet but it is a very important piece of 22 evidence. The time data was shown on the video itself 23 and it lasted for five or six seconds. 24 (Video played) 25 We can see the platform of the first floor, the</p>
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<p>1 attention to the top-right corner, which is the time 2 stamp. We will now play the video. 3 (Video played) 4 The time is 14:11. On the top-right corner, there 5 was a passerby. 14:33, if you look closely, you can see 6 embers and some debris on the right-hand side falling 7 from above. We are playing it on double speed. 8 Now, fast-forward, you can see there is some smoke 9 in the light well. 10 Let's look at the video again. I suggest that we 11 dim the lights later on to make the video more clear. 12 (Video played) 13 At 14:43, you can see that in the circle there are 14 some flashes. It looks like burning embers. On the 15 top-right corner of the screen, you can also see a 16 larger flash. 17 By 14:44 and 14:45, there are other instances of 18 flash. And then there were several after that. 19 Right-bottom corner. 20 We will now fast-forward the video to the last three 21 minutes of the video. It will end at 14:48:02. 22 (Video played) 23 All the CCTV footages at Wang Cheong House have 24 stopped at the same time, so we believe that the fire 25 has damaged the data transmission cable at the same</p>	<p>1 rooftop, the scene we were seeing just now and the 2 flashes on the right is exactly at this location. At 3 around 2.45, the police received the first 999 emergency 4 call. 5 (Audio played) 6 AUDIO RECORDING: 999 Operator: Hong Kong Island. 7 Caller: This is a construction site near 8 Wang Fuk Court where reno works are ongoing. The 9 scaffolding is on fire. 10 999 Operator: I will put you to the FSD. May I 11 know your surname? 12 Caller: I'm from Wang Fuk Court. 13 999 Operator: Are you a passerby? 14 Caller: yes. We're making videos. It is on fire. 15 999 Operator: Are you looking from the ground 16 floor? 17 Caller: Yes. 18 999 Operator: A fire. 19 FSD Operator: Couldn't get it. Where? 20 Caller: Tai Po, Wang Fuk Court. The facade repair 21 works scaffolding on fire. 22 FSD Operator: All right. Wang Fuk Court, what 23 house is it? 24 Caller: I couldn't get you. 25 FSD Operator: What house?</p>

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<p>1 Caller: Ah, I don't know. I'm just cycling by.                  2 What's the house? Wang -- What house? Does anyone know                  3 the name of the house? Wang Cheong House. What house                  4 is it? Do you have address? Big fire!                  5 FSD Operator: Okay. Okay. The ambulance has been                  6 dispatched to Wang Cheong House. Is it Wang Cheong                  7 House?                  8 Caller: Wang Cheong House. Yes, the fire, it's                  9 blazing.                  10 999 Operator: Can you give us your phone number?                  11 Sir, please, don't take video-recording. Are we talking                  12 about the lower floors or the middle floor?                  13 Caller: The lower floor.                  14 999 Operator: Okay. We're on the way.                  15 MR DAWES: In three minutes, Mr Yip Fai also took a series                  16 of video-recording. The location was at Yuen Chau Tsai                  17 Park. It is to the east of Wang Cheong House, the light                  18 well there.                  19 (Video played)                  20 VIDEO RECORDING: Speaker 1: This is Yuen Chau Tsai Park,                  21 facing Wang Cheong House of Wang Fuk Court. Now, the                  22 whole building is on fire from the bottom.                  23 Speaker 2: No one has sounded the fire alarm.                  24 Speaker 1: What about the workers there?                  25 Speaker 2: The whole building, the fire alarm</p>	<p>1 evidence that created great difficulties for                  2 firefighting work.                  3 (Video played)                  4 VIDEO RECORDING: Let's run!                  5 MR DAWES: Let's pause.                  6 If we analyse this incident, yes, the fire was                  7 serious at Wang Cheong House, but it had yet to spread                  8 to other buildings. Evacuation, how, and whether it                  9 could be done is something to be explored later.                  10 The spread of the fire in the initial stage was                  11 recorded by a passerby on the southern part of the                  12 court. Here is another footage starting from 15:02, the                  13 whole Wang Cheong House was engulfed in fire. Back                  14 then, in less than a minute, you can see that another                  15 light well on the south of Wang Fuk Court was totally                  16 ablaze right to the rooftop.                  17 (Video played)                  18 Chair and members, that is 15:03. Now, that is not                  19 the light well where the fire started. We're talking                  20 about another light well.                  21 At 3.09 pm, from another angle, we can see the fire                  22 of Wang Cheong House. Please note two points. Now, the                  23 extent of fire on the ground floor, you can see is the                  24 lobby of Wang Cheong House. That means the main means                  25 of escape at 3.09 for residents was already blocked.</p>
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<p>1 hasn't got. There's a fire, fire!                  2 MR DAWES: So you can notice that no fire alarm was heard.                  3 In around three minutes, the blaze has spread eastward                  4 from the light well to the upper floors.                  5 In the next video you can see the extent of the fire                  6 and when the firefighters arrived. It was six minutes                  7 from the first emergency call. From the video, you can                  8 also see that the scaffolding on the facade started to                  9 fall down.                  10 (Video played)                  11 VIDEO RECORDING: Speaker 1: It has reached the fourth                  12 floor. How can I switch it off?                  13 Speaker 2: Run!                  14 Speaker 1: Run! Fire! The firefighters have                  15 arrived. We saw them. Firemen.                  16 Speaker 2: It's reached the 8th floor, really high.                  17 Speaker 1: We have to run. We have to escape.                  18 Yes. Let's step back. Yes, move back. Oh, it's                  19 serious. Be careful. Watch out. Move back. What                  20 a blaze! Let's run for it! Let's get away! Get away!                  21 Move, it's collapsing!                  22 MR DAWES: Chair, members, you observed how the bamboo fell                  23 down and then, from 14:57 to 14:58, the structure of the                  24 scaffolding had broken down and the falling of bamboo                  25 scaffolding was getting more serious. You can hear from</p>	<p>1 (Video played)                  2 And the second point to note from the footage: it                  3 only took 30 seconds for the fire to reach a few floors.                  4 Chair and members, in summary, you can see the                  5 spread of the fire at 2.42 to 2.45 was found by workers                  6 and then, in less than 10 minutes, that is at 2.58, the                  7 fire has already burned the whole building on the light                  8 well on the east and then, at 3.03 pm, the south light                  9 well was also engulfed in fire.                  10 Five minutes later, in other words at 3.08 pm, the                  11 fire spread to the other half of Wang Cheong House.                  12 That is the lobby, we can see it was already a major                  13 fire.                  14 Chair and members, due to time constraint we can                  15 only see a few minutes of the footage, but the legal                  16 team in the past few months has made reference to over                  17 400,000 footages, most of them supplied by members of                  18 the public to the police. We would like to thank the                  19 public because they were very useful for us to re-create                  20 what happened on that day.                  21 Now we will look at the spread of the fire from                  22 Wang Cheong House to Wang Tai House. We're going to                  23 show you a CCTV footage at 2.58 pm, that is about 10-odd                  24 minutes from the first discovery of the fire.                  25 From the footage, you can see debris and flashes</p>

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<p>1 found at Wang Tai House. We are going to play the 2 footage at double speed. The footage was made at the 3 CCTV of Wang Tai House. We will show you the location 4 later. 5 (Video played) 6 You can start to see smoke. The red circle is the 7 location captured by the CCTV. From other CCTVs, we can 8 see that at 3.02 pm the other scaffolding of Wang Tai 9 House started to go on fire. 10 This is at 3.04. The time of the spread echoes with 11 the statement made by Mr Hui, senior fire officer. 12 According to him, it was at around 3 o'clock when the 13 fire spread from Wang Cheong to Wang Tai House, east 14 side. 15 Let's look at 3.16. The situation is similar to 16 that of Wang Cheong House. It started in the light well 17 at Wang Tai House. The left side is Wang Tai House, 18 that column of fire is from Wang Tai House. 19 (Video played) 20 Now let's look at a minute later. The south side of 21 the light well of Wang Tai House was ablaze. You can 22 see the spread and the fierceness of the fire started at 23 the light well of each block. According to the evidence 24 supplied by the Fire Services Department, FSD, the time 25 of the spread and the chronology of the five blocks is</p>	<p>1 bamboo scaffoldings. 2 MR DAWES: I'd like to draw members' and Chairman's 3 attention to here. At the same -- you can see from the 4 footage from the same location, at 3.25 the fire spread 5 to the right-hand side, the next block, Wang Sun House. 6 VIDEO RECORDING: Speaker 1: It's got fire. That block has 7 got fire as well. 8 Speaker 2: Oh, dear, the sound breaks my heart. 9 This block too. It's gone to this block. 10 Speaker 1: The flames are flying to other blocks. 11 It's gone to this side. 12 Speaker 3: It's scary. 13 MR DAWES: You can see the kindling. Another clip, 3.59 pm. 14 It's the fire at Wang Sun House. This is the clearest 15 image we've had. Within one and a half minutes, the 16 fire started, the fire spread from the ground floor to 17 the top floor within a very short time. 18 (Video played) 19 VIDEO RECORDING: There are all people inside. It breaks my 20 heart. It's very dangerous. 21 MR DAWES: Within just three minutes the situation has 22 worsened. Now, looking from a further location at 23 4.11 pm, the fire spread from Wang Tao House to Wang Yan 24 House. Of the eight blocks, seven of them have been 25 engulfed in fire.</p>
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<p>1 like this: 3.20, Wang Shing House; Wang Kin and Wang Sun 2 House, 3.25; Wang Tao House, 3.39; and Wang Yan house, 3 4.04. 4 We use the information at hand to analyse the 5 chronology of the speed of the fire. We see that the 6 speed of the fire of the spread of the fire is actually 7 slightly faster than the information supplied by the 8 FSD. 9 Let's look at 3.10. 10 (Video played) 11 Wang Shing House, that is the right of Wang Cheong 12 House, you see that Wang Shing House is ablaze. Can you 13 see some flames on the net outside Wang Shing House? 14 From CCTV footage we see that at 3.12, debris 15 started falling to Wang Sun House. The fire was small 16 at that time but you could see flames. 17 This is Wang Sun House. Camera number 30, the one 18 circled. 19 (Video played) 20 Now I will show you a different clip. The viewpoint 21 is point from Kwong Lai House of Kwong Fuk Estate, 22 a nearby residential area, it looks to Wang Kin House. 23 At 3.20 you can see the flame. 24 VIDEO RECORDING: It is serious. I don't think we need to 25 evacuate yet. The fire is not as serious. There are no</p>	<p>1 (Video played) 2 We saw the fire on the facade, the external wall. 3 Now, we will show you a clip from Cable News. We can 4 see that the fire quickly spread from the outside to the 5 inside, that is the units. From the left to the right 6 is Wang Yan, Wang Tao, Wang Kin, Wang Shing, Wang Tai 7 and Wang Cheong. This is 5.30 pm. 8 The majority of the scaffolding nets have gone. 9 (Video played) 10 I'd like to draw attention to the fact that you can 11 see the fires inside some units, especially in Wang Tao, 12 Wang Kin and Wang Tai, these blocks. 13 Same clip at 6 pm. You see that multiple units in 14 six blocks are on fire. 15 (Video played) 16 At 6.32 you see there are other flames at light 17 wells. 18 Please note the left-upper side of this clip you can 19 see the fire, the seriousness of the fire. You can't 20 see it all, but some of it. 21 At 9.30 pm there is not much change compared to the 22 situation earlier, but you can see the inside of many 23 flats are now on fire. You see the living room, bedroom 24 and kitchen of many people's homes. They are on fire, 25 and at that time it's confirmed that nine people have</p>

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1 died.

2 I will show you very quickly what happened

3 afterwards. The fire continued throughout the night.

4 From a clip from HK01, it showed at 2 am that this is

5 what's happening.

6 (Video played)

7 Wang Shing, Wang Tai, Wang Cheong, many of the

8 flats, the insides are ablaze. At that time, it's

9 confirmed that 36 people have died.

10 Now let's look at 5 am. The fire slightly subsided,

11 but many of the flats in Wang Sun are still ablaze.

12 Now let's look at 7 am. At 7 o'clock there is

13 a marked improvement. At that time it was confirmed

14 that 44 people have died. The situation of the fire was

15 recorded, but at 7 pm you can see that there is fire in

16 some of the units. The firefighting operation

17 continued.

18 Now let's look at 1 am. The fire continued. At

19 that time, 83 people have died from the fire. The

20 record shows that the firefighting operation at 10.18 on

21 20 November 2025, the fire was finally put out. It

22 lasted 43 hours.

23 I will explain to you the cause of the fire as we

24 have seen it.

25 CHAIRMAN: This will be a time for a 10-minute break.

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1 (11.15 am)

2 (A short adjournment)

3 (11.25 am)

4 CHAIRMAN: The evidential hearing now resumes.

5 MR DAWES: In the following, I would like to submit to the

6 Committee our preliminary understanding of the cause of

7 the fire. We have received the report, a preliminary

8 report prepared by the Fire Investigation Task Force led

9 by the FSD. The report is drafted by government

10 experts, including Dr Lee Wing Man from the government

11 laboratory.

12 Before reaching any conclusion, of course the

13 Committee will consider the final report from the Fire

14 Investigation Task Force and also the report drafted by

15 Prof Usami and Jiang Liming from PolyU.

16 We will first look at the preliminary report

17 provided by the government laboratory and the Fire

18 Investigation Task Force. First of all, all evidence

19 points to that the fire started at the flat roof of the

20 light well outside flats 104 and 104 of Wang Cheong

21 House. That's the location shown on the 3D model.

22 We have also seen a footage filmed by a passerby,

23 Mr Yip Fai, and also the CCTV footage to ascertain the

24 origin of the fire.

25 According to Dr Lee Wing Man's witness statement

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1 submitted last year, there was some analysis. In

2 figure 1, the floor plan of Wang Cheong House, it shows

3 that the concrete at the bottom of the light well

4 outside flats 104 and 105 were subject to severe damage.

5 The metal fence guarding the place has also deformed.

6 It shows the severity of the fire. During our site

7 visit, we have also looked at this location. In the

8 following, we would like to show the Committee some

9 photographs showing the severity of the damage.

10 You can see that there are some foam boards which

11 were unburnt and also cigarette butts. The Fire

12 Investigation Task Force believes that the likely cause

13 of the initial fire was a lighted cigarette igniting

14 nearby combustible material at the flat roof outside

15 flats 104 and 105.

16 Of course we emphasise that we might not be able to

17 obtain direct evidence pointing to the actual cause of

18 the fire. When the fire was discovered, it was already

19 very severe and also several minutes have passed since

20 the ignition. These are circumstantial evidence and we

21 may not be able to pinpoint the actual cause of the

22 fire.

23 We would like to relay the initial results or

24 findings from Dr Lee. In paragraph 2.19, she said that

25 the light well outside flats 104 and 105, after some

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1 excavation, the police has found a large number of burnt

2 carton boxes and also rubbish, like plastic gloves,

3 drink cans, spoons and two cigarette butts.

4 The initial report also mentioned that it seems that

5 there is evidence pointing to someone smoking in the

6 light well. The likely cause of the fire should be

7 lighted cigarettes igniting nearby carton boxes.

8 Besides cigarette butts found outside the flats 104 and

9 105, there is other indirect evidence showing that

10 smoking and cigarette butts may be the cause of this

11 fire.

12 You will still remember that from the video we have

13 seen this morning from outside the 5th floor

14 scaffolding, there was someone saying, "Is someone

15 smoking?" These are not direct evidence, but, taken

16 together, there is sufficient evidence pointing to the

17 same.

18 And also, there is a worker which I've mentioned,

19 Mr Cheng Shek Wan, his evidence given to the police also

20 aligns with that. At 2.40 pm, when he was working on

21 the 5th floor, he heard someone asking, "Who is smoking?"

22 There is a fire downstairs".

23 On the day of the fire there was also direct

24 evidence showing that there were construction workers

25 smoking on the site. For example, on the rooftop of

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<p>1 Wang Cheong House at 2.10 pm and 2.43 pm, CCTV footage                  2 shows workers smoking. This is the video filmed at                  3 2.10 pm.                  4 (Video played)                  5 That is the worker.                  6 This is the rooftop of Wang Cheong House.                  7 2.43, the image is even clearer.                  8 Of course, I emphasise that we are not saying that                  9 it is the cigarette of this particular smoker which                  10 caused the fire, but this is evidence that there were                  11 construction workers smoking at Wang Fuk Court, and                  12 there is evidence showing that residents have been                  13 complaining about workers smoking for a long time. More                  14 evidence will be shown later on.                  15 At this stage, I would like to point out that the                  16 task force has excluded other reasons for the cause of                  17 the fire. The task force think that it is not likely                  18 that the fire was caused by faulty electric appliances.                  19 The EMSD has conducted an investigation afterwards.                  20 No cables or electric appliances were found in the light                  21 well. The EMSD has also investigated the two flats'                  22 nearby, as well as the bicycle parking areas nearby.                  23 There was no evidence pointing to faulty electrical                  24 appliances.                  25 The circuit breaker was functioning normally. It</p>	<p>1 laboratory has conducted examination on the concrete                  2 from the light well and there was no burning signs from                  3 accelerant or flammable gases.                  4 Again, I emphasise that construction workers smoking                  5 is an issue that the residents have made complaints for                  6 a very long time, and also there are evidences pointing                  7 to that. However, we may never be able to find the                  8 direct evidence pointing to that, not to mention which                  9 particular worker's behaviour caused the fire.                  10 However, it seems that the flat roof of the light                  11 well has been used by workers as a resting place and for                  12 storage and there are combustible objects found.                  13 In fact, construction workers, should they need to                  14 smoke, they should smoke in designated areas in Wang Fuk                  15 Court, but these rules have been broken. We will                  16 explore these issues in our subsequent proceedings.                  17 Concerning the fatalities or casualties of the fire,                  18 in the process of the evidential hearing we will hear                  19 more evidence concerning the cause of the fire but                  20 I would like to stress that not all fire would cause                  21 such a large extent of damage. Even for fire of a                  22 similar magnitude, there might not be so many                  23 casualties. According to common sense and according to                  24 past experience, a normal fire, usually the cause would                  25 be an accident. We can never eliminate all causes of</p>
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<p>1 shows that on the day of the fire, flats 104 and 105 did                  2 not experience a short-circuit.                  3 The task force has also excluded that the fire was                  4 caused by gas leakage. In the light well, there were                  5 some LPG pipes laid by China Petroleum. Of course, the                  6 LPG pipe was deformed after the fire, but the structure                  7 of the pipe themselves were intact. No sign of                  8 corrosion was found.                  9 If the fire was caused by rupture of pressurised                  10 risers, there should be fire erupting from the pipes,                  11 but the evidence shows that, at the initial stage of the                  12 fire at the light well, it was rather slow. The column                  13 of fire only appeared after a certain period of time.                  14 So the likelihood of a gas leakage from the pipe causing                  15 the fire is not in line with the evidence.                  16 Concerning the likelihood that the fire was caused                  17 by construction works, it's not likely. Usually, fire                  18 at construction sites caused by works would be from                  19 welding works. At the time, only tiling works was in                  20 progress on the facade. It involves no sparks.                  21 So, according to the initial evidence, the fire was                  22 not caused by the above reasons.                  23 The task force has also excluded that the fire was                  24 caused by accelerant or flammable gas. At the scene, no                  25 accelerants or traces were found. The government</p>	<p>1 fire on construction sites.                  2 According to the FSD, in year 2024, the FSD has                  3 received 37,828 calls of fire. Among them, 5,222 were                  4 fires of scale which could not be extinguished in a                  5 short period of time. There were 33 dead and 449                  6 injured. For most of the instances, fire were caused by                  7 accidents, like cooking in kitchen or negligence in                  8 handling flammable objects, for example, cigarettes or                  9 candles. There were also fire caused by faulty                  10 electrical appliances.                  11 Compared with past figures, the fire in Wang Fuk                  12 Court caused astounding damage. The Committee must put                  13 its focus on the reason why the casualties are so large,                  14 to find out what we can learn from this tragedy.                  15 In examining the causes of the heavy casualties, we                  16 hope to learn more about how to retard the spread of                  17 fire and in emergency response and alerting residents.                  18 We should also focus on facade repair works where there                  19 are residents still living and then we should review the                  20 series of work to minimise the possibility of repeated                  21 incident.                  22 We have received evidence from the police and FSD on                  23 the number of casualties and fatalities. We received                  24 voluminous evidence. To those who are bereaved and who                  25 have suffered from the fire, we express our deepest</p>

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1 condolences. On behalf of the legal team, we would like  
 2 to express our deepest condolences to all affected  
 3 families. As we all now, 169 lives were lost and there  
 4 were also casualties. Among the 168 deaths, 150 were  
 5 residents living there, nine foreign domestic helpers,  
 6 seven construction workers, one visitor, and as we all  
 7 know, there was also one fireman.  
 8 According to our statistics, 37 households lost more  
 9 than two family members. Some were spouses or parents,  
 10 siblings, children. 58 of the deaths were male, 110  
 11 were women, aged between six months and 98 years of age;  
 12 114 were over 65 years old and seven were under 18 years  
 13 old.  
 14 This is heartbreaking information. We have heard  
 15 stories of families missing their loved ones and also  
 16 people who sacrificed their lives.  
 17 In Wang Tai House there are families where  
 18 grandparents and also a one-year-old granddaughter and  
 19 a foreign domestic helper passed away together. In  
 20 Wang Cheong House there was a family where a couple  
 21 together with their six-month old granddaughter passed  
 22 away. And in one family both the mother and two  
 23 daughters were sacrificed, they were aged 10 and 13  
 24 years old.  
 25 In the coming few days, survivors of Wang Fuk Court

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1 will come to give evidence and we will hear more about  
 2 what happened then.  
 3 To all foreign domestic helpers who have lost their  
 4 lives in the fire, we also send our deepest condolences.  
 5 Most of them remained in the flats to take care of the  
 6 elderly and children. They remained in their duty and  
 7 they passed away together with their employers or family  
 8 members.  
 9 For those who were injured, they aged between  
 10 three months and 87 years old. 13 of them are  
 11 firefighters or ambulance men. 56 are residents. Most  
 12 of them were injured by inhaling smoke, and for  
 13 frontline firefighters, they had physical injuries, heat  
 14 exhaustion and some suffered burns.  
 15 This is the distribution of fatalities and injuries.  
 16 This is representation made by City University. Most  
 17 fatalities and injuries occurred at Wang Cheong House  
 18 and Wang Tai House, marked in yellow, the two blocks  
 19 marked in yellow.  
 20 Wang Cheong House, 81 fatalities and 33 injuries.  
 21 Most were found dead in their own flats.  
 22 In Wang Tai House, 82 passed away, 14 were injured.  
 23 Most of the people passed away were found at the  
 24 staircases.  
 25 As regards other houses, Wang Kin House, no injury

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1 or casualty was found; Wang Shing House, one death and  
 2 two injuries; Wang Sun House, two deaths; Wang Tao  
 3 House, nine injured and two deaths; and Wang Yan House,  
 4 one injury.  
 5 We will further hear evidence from members of the  
 6 public, the police and also the firefighters on  
 7 firefighting and search and rescue operations and also  
 8 recovery of corpses.  
 9 We have the following observations to make in this  
 10 regard. For cases of fatalities and injuries, they  
 11 focused in Wang Tai House and Wang Cheong House where  
 12 the fire first started. Wang Sun House, block C, the  
 13 building was most severely damaged. The internal damage  
 14 was very similar to that of Wang Cheong and Wang Tai  
 15 Houses but only two fatalities were found. The cause of  
 16 the lower death rate might be because of the fact that  
 17 the fire alarm was still operating. We will go into  
 18 this point later.  
 19 Wang Shing House, one fatality, two injuries.  
 20 Residents were by and large able to flee because the  
 21 spread of fire to Wang Shing House was at a later stage.  
 22 Wang Kin and Wang Yan Houses, no fatalities, very  
 23 few number of injuries. This is because Wang Kin House  
 24 was not affected by the fire.  
 25 As regards Wang Yan House, although the magnitude of

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1 fire was substantial, our observation is perhaps it's  
 2 because the fire alarm did go, and some used handheld  
 3 loudspeakers to remind residents to escape. The fire  
 4 only spread to the upper floors at 6.30 pm, so there was  
 5 time for residents to leave.  
 6 Among the fatalities, 100 of them were found dead in  
 7 their flats. This, we can conclude that most passed  
 8 away because of fire/smoke entering the units. It can  
 9 also be because of the fact that residents left their  
 10 flats but they found that the corridors and staircases  
 11 were already heavily covered with smoke or fire and they  
 12 were not able to leave the building safely, so there  
 13 were forced to remain in their flats.  
 14 Among the survivors, according to residents of  
 15 Wang Fuk Court, we understood how they fled and we can  
 16 have the following conclusions. In all eight blocks,  
 17 over 250 units saw residents who left the building by  
 18 elevators. About 150 members from 150 flats used the  
 19 stairs. So more fled by using the lifts. In over  
 20 35 locations, 50 members of the public were rescued.  
 21 Some were at common places such as the corridors or  
 22 staircases, and some were inside their flats. A point  
 23 to notice: at least 900 residents, accounting for  
 24 60 per cent of the number of residents we interviewed,  
 25 were not inside Wang Fuk Court at the time of the fire.

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<p>1 They were either at work or in school or doing their 2 business outside of the flats. 3 Now, if the fire had occurred at night, you can 4 imagine the gravity of the consequence. 5 It is worthy to note that while some flats were 6 totally perished, but there were also flats not affected 7 by the fire at all. 8 Chair and members of the Committee, you may recall 9 that when we first made our site visit to Wang Fuk 10 Court, we were led to flat 105 where the fire first 11 started. This is flat 105 shown. The extent of 12 destruction was really serious. The whole flat was more 13 or less burnt down. 14 CHAIRMAN: But it's not very clear. When we did the site 15 visit it was clearer. Can we adjust the brightness, 16 please? 17 MR DAWES: Hang on, we may be able to improve it. 18 It's a little bit better now. Flat 105 was 19 seriously burned. But then we were led to a flat just 20 next door, on the same floor. This is flat 103. This 21 is the situation after the fire, some more or less like 22 that, when we visited the site, the fire did not affect 23 the neighboring unit, not at all. All paper stuff 24 inside the flat was intact, tissue boxes, et cetera. So 25 how the fire entered the flat is an important point for</p>	<p>1 number 1 or 3, or for units 3 to 8, they were affected 2 to a certain extent. About 63 per cent of the flats 3 were heavily affected. They were totally burnt down or 4 seriously affected. There was carbonisation and 5 disfiguration. Most combustible items were burned. 6 This is Wang Tai House. Flat numbers 1 to 5 and 8 were 7 affected. About 58 per cent of the flats were seriously 8 burned or very seriously burned. 9 We turn to Wang Kin House. The situation was 10 totally different. Only a small number of units were 11 affected. Only one unit was more seriously damaged. 12 Now we turn to Wang Sun House. Wang Sun, all units 13 were subject to a certain extent of destruction. About 14 68 per cent of them were seriously burned. 15 And Wang Tao House, flat numbers 2 and 3, we can see 16 that most all of them were seriously or most seriously 17 destructed, and the rest of the flats were intact. 18 Wang Yan House, similar. 19 Wang Shing House. Flat number 6 were seriously 20 affected. The other units were almost intact. 21 So we have seen all the staircases with means of 22 escape. 23 And Wang Yan, Wang Tao, Wang Kin and Wang Sun House, 24 the staircases therein, there was no damage at all. 25 Wang Shing, Wang Tai and Wang Cheong Houses, their</p>
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<p>1 expert investigators. As we said, most casualties or 2 fatalities took place inside the flats. 3 The fire started at the facade of the building. The 4 burning of flats, is it possible to prevent the fire 5 from entering the flat? The blazing foam boards on 6 windows, had it led to the burning of the internal flats 7 from scaffolding? We have seen fire at building facades 8 in the past, it is not unusual. But this time around we 9 have seen so many fatalities. 10 May I show you the next video. 11 (Video played) 12 It was taken in 2023, a major fire in Tianjin. 13 First, it's got the same chimney effect. You can see 14 the column of fire. However, inside the unit the office 15 workers there seemingly were not affected. There was no 16 fatality in that fire. The heavy smoke and fire did not 17 enter into the unit from the facade. 18 The FSD provided pictures of each and every unit and 19 also gave us its assessment. On the whole, for the 20 seven blocks of building affected, totalling 21 1,736 flats, 924 of them, or about 53 per cent of them 22 was subject to destruction of different extent. 812 of 23 them were totally intact. 24 As far as Wang Cheong House is concerned, this is at 25 a glance the situation of the flats. Now, for flats</p>	<p>1 staircases were all burned. 2 Now, this coincided with evidence of the spread of 3 the fire in other seven blocks. Now, I'd like to state 4 to the Committee how all the passive and active fire 5 prevention measures failed. 6 Fatalities and injuries focused in Wang Cheong House 7 and Wang Tai House; we will conduct further 8 investigation. A very important issue is to review how 9 residents evacuated from the blocks and the ability to 10 evacuate from these blocks. We will assess the time 11 available to residents to evacuate from the blocks and 12 also the factors affecting the time available for 13 evacuation. We can look at the Buildings Fire Safety 14 Regulations amended in 2011 and also further revised in 15 2024. G1, you can see the Chinese version here. 16 Now, in a time axis we have this ASET, available 17 safe evacuation time. In the middle we have RSET, 18 required safe evacuation time, meaning the time required 19 for evacuation. If the means of escape is no longer 20 safe, there is no way people can evacuate, and the time 21 available for evacuation as a result. 22 Now, if the means of escape, meaning the corridors 23 and staircases, are clouded by smoke and fire, this will 24 greatly lower ASET, the time available for evacuation. 25 This will greatly reduce the possibility of fatalities</p>

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<p>1 or casualties.</p> <p>2 Now, for means of escape, from our evidence, the</p> <p>3 staircases in particular were already crowded with smoke</p> <p>4 in the very initial stage of the fire, and this explains</p> <p>5 why so many people used the lifts instead of stairs for</p> <p>6 evacuation.</p> <p>7 We talk about the RSET now. When the fire started</p> <p>8 to the point of discovery of fire, if the usual devices</p> <p>9 such as the fire alarms, if it failed, it will greatly</p> <p>10 increase RSET, this is the time required for evacuation.</p> <p>11 by residents. According to evidence, many residents</p> <p>12 told us in our interview or survey that they did not</p> <p>13 hear the fire alarm. This is because the fire alarm had</p> <p>14 failed. And although the fire alarm was not the only</p> <p>15 way for them to find out that there was a fire, many of</p> <p>16 the windows were blocked by the foam boards, so they</p> <p>17 were not able to see the fire/smoke outside their</p> <p>18 building. This also affected their sense to evacuate.</p> <p>19 As we've mentioned before, the means of escape is</p> <p>20 the scissor stairs as well as a corridor in the shape of</p> <p>21 a U. At that time, the stairs and the corridors were</p> <p>22 not tenable in stopping fire and smoke from entering.</p> <p>23 We can see that the means of escape did not perform the</p> <p>24 function they were supposed to.</p> <p>25 Next to the lift lobby, as well as the corridors,</p>	<p>1 from this clip.</p> <p>2 (Video played)</p> <p>3 You can see workers using the opening to go and</p> <p>4 enter, to enter and leave in and out of the building.</p> <p>5 These are the photographs. We believe that these</p> <p>6 temporary openings do not meet F paragraph 5.6 in the</p> <p>7 relevant code of practice. We will in due course assess</p> <p>8 whether these openings is the reason why heavy smoke and</p> <p>9 fire entered the inside of the building thereby blocking</p> <p>10 the means of escape of residents.</p> <p>11 Please hold.</p> <p>12 To look into the cause of the heavy casualties at</p> <p>13 Wang Cheong and Wang Tai Houses we will look at the</p> <p>14 interior of the buildings, especially that of</p> <p>15 Wang Cheong and Wang Tai Houses.</p> <p>16 I'd like to stress that clips of the inside of the</p> <p>17 building during the fire is limited. It's not because</p> <p>18 there was no installation of CCTV cameras, it's because</p> <p>19 the majority of the cameras were down during the fire.</p> <p>20 We get the information from cameras inside flats,</p> <p>21 emergency calls, as well as various clips to put</p> <p>22 together the general picture.</p> <p>23 Now, we'll start with Wang Cheong House.</p> <p>24 At 2:52:57 in the afternoon the police received the</p> <p>25 first call for assistance. It's about 10 minutes after</p>
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<p>1 the windows of these locations can be opened. During</p> <p>2 the fire, the windows of some corridors on certain</p> <p>3 floors will open. You can imagine that when they are</p> <p>4 open, the heavy smoke from the scaffolding will quickly</p> <p>5 enter the lift lobby and the stairs. This will reduce</p> <p>6 the time for escape.</p> <p>7 This clip was taken just before 3.18 pm on the</p> <p>8 31st floor of Wang Tai House. We can ascertain the time</p> <p>9 because the CCTV shows that a group of people used the</p> <p>10 lift to escape. That's how we verify the time of the</p> <p>11 clip.</p> <p>12 (Video played)</p> <p>13 VIDEO RECORDING: Quick! Quick, run!</p> <p>14 MR DAWES: We can see at that time heavy smoke swarmed in</p> <p>15 through the window in the lift corridor on that floor.</p> <p>16 The Committee will look into the suitability of</p> <p>17 facilities such as how the windows affect the means of</p> <p>18 escape as well as the relevant regulations.</p> <p>19 It is unsettling to learn about the situation about</p> <p>20 the stairs. A lot of the windows on different floors</p> <p>21 along the staircase were removed and turned into outlets</p> <p>22 built with wood. You can see that these are the</p> <p>23 converted means of escape during the renovation.</p> <p>24 Workers used these openings to enter and leave the</p> <p>25 building. You will get a better understanding of this</p>	<p>1 workers have discovered that there was heavy smoke.</p> <p>2 It's about two minutes after the first call for</p> <p>3 assistance by a passerby.</p> <p>4 At about 2.52 we can see that in the staircase on</p> <p>5 the 10th floor it was filled with heavy smoke.</p> <p>6 VIDEO RECORDING: 999 Operator: Ambulance?</p> <p>7 Caller: This is Wang Fuk Estate. I smell heavy</p> <p>8 smoke. It filled a corridor. The scaffolding is on</p> <p>9 fire.</p> <p>10 999 Operator: The scaffolding is on fire, right?</p> <p>11 Now please go to a safe place.</p> <p>12 Caller: Yes.</p> <p>13 999 Operator: Can you see from where the smoke</p> <p>14 come?</p> <p>15 Caller: It fill --</p> <p>16 999 Operator: The corridor's filled with smoke,</p> <p>17 it's on the 10th floor?</p> <p>18 Caller: Yes.</p> <p>19 999 Operator: I'm trying to connect to the FSD.</p> <p>20 There are many calls coming in.</p> <p>21 The 10th floor is filled with smoke?</p> <p>22 MR DAWES: We understand the caller is a lady, Wang Kai</p> <p>23 Yuen. She was one of the few who could escape from</p> <p>24 Wang Cheong House. Her statement to the police</p> <p>25 clarified it was about 2.50 in the afternoon that she</p>

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<p>1 smelled smoke from the corridor, but she did not see any                  2 smoke or fire.                  3 At about 2.55, Ms Wang successfully left Wang Cheong                  4 House. We learned that at that time the staircase was                  5 in an acceptable condition at that time. Ms Wang will                  6 explain to us the situation in this hearing.                  7 At 2:59:55, unit 2701 gave us a call and they said                  8 that it was their unit 2701. They said that there was a                  9 fire on the 28th floor. It's sad to learn that the                  10 family in that unit died.                  11 (Audio played)                  12 AUDIO RECORDING: Caller: Wang Cheong House in Wang Fuk                  13 Court.                  14 999 Operator: Are you calling for ambulance or the                  15 police?                  16 Caller: There is a fire.                  17 999 Operator: Fire, please, don't hang up.                  18 Caller: There is a fire. We're on the 28th floor.                  19 999 Operator: Are you in a safe place?                  20 Caller: I don't know. When I opened the door, I                  21 saw smoke.                  22 999 Operator: We have been receiving reports. The                  23 police and the fire services are arriving.                  24 Caller: The fire is burning here.                  25 999 Operator: What floor? Where is the fire?</p>	<p>1 are you suffering from any discomfort?                  2 Caller 2: My flat is filled with smoke. I don't                  3 know where it comes from.                  4 FSD Operator: Don't worry. The smoke came from the                  5 first floor of your block from the scaffolding. We are                  6 fighting the fire there. Don't worry. We're coming up.                  7 Caller: The scaffolding outside the unit is on                  8 fire.                  9 FSD Operator: Yes. Please confirm that you are                  10 unit 2701. Don't worry. Stay in the unit. Wait for                  11 us.                  12 Caller: If there is a need, call us.                  13 FSD Operator: We're on our way. We know you're                  14 there. We are on the way to come and get you.                  15 MR DAWES: We played the recording to show you what happened                  16 on that floor. When it comes to handling incoming                  17 calls, there is a procedure and protocol to follow. We                  18 want you to understand what the procedure is, is there                  19 any room for improvement and whether the established                  20 procedure is correct. That's why we played the clip.                  21 There won't be many of these in the future.                  22 We have clips on the 15th floor of Wang Cheong                  23 House. At the beginning of the fire, this is what                  24 happened.                  25 (Video played)</p>
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<p>1 Caller 2: There is a fire, 28th floor. Fire's                  2 fierce. And it's the net.                  3 999 Operator: Net outside on the scaffolding?                  4 Caller 2: Yes, yes, there is a lot of smoke.                  5 999 Operator: The fire service is coming. We're                  6 making the connection to the department. Do you want                  7 them to come to rescue you?                  8 Caller 2: Yes, there is fire on our floor. It's                  9 the 27th floor. We are unit 2701. Please help us.                  10 999 Operator: We're trying to connect to the FSD.                  11 There are many calls. Please don't hang up.                  12 This is Wang Cheong House. There is a fire. They                  13 ask to be rescued.                  14 FSD Operator: Which unit?                  15 Caller 2: 2701.                  16 FSD Operator: Unit 1 on the 27th floor, yes?                  17 Caller 2: Yes.                  18 FSD Operator: How many people are there?                  19 Caller 2: Two. We're two elderly people.                  20 FSD Operator: Gender?                  21 Caller 2: One male, one female.                  22 FSD Operator: Please leave me your contact number.                  23 Do you use a mobile phone?                  24 Caller 2: Yes. This is the landline.                  25 FSD Operator: Tell me your mobile number. Well,</p>	<p>1 The clip's gone viral on the internet. We stop the                  2 clip at 2.53. At 2.53 there was no fire in the                  3 corridor. Now, it's 2:54:10.                  4 VIDEO RECORDING: Yes, there is smoke. We have to go.                  5 MR DAWES: Please bear with me. We may have to restart.                  6 VIDEO RECORDING: Let's go.                  7 MR DAWES: Let's skip this clip at Wang Cheong House.                  8 Apologies for the hiccup. What we'd like to show                  9 from this clip is that at about 2.55 the stairs were                  10 engulfed in heavy smoke and the corridors were covered                  11 in heavy smoke at about 3 o'clock.                  12 In Wang Tai House, the first call to 999 took place                  13 at 3.19 pm from 2307, this unit. Let's hear the call.                  14 (Audio played)                  15 AUDIO RECORDING: 999 Operator: 999 call centre.                  16 Caller: My house is on fire.                  17 999 Operator: Where?                  18 Caller: Wang Fuk Court. I'm sure you know. This                  19 is unit 2307. I can't leave. Just to let you know.                  20 999 Operator: Do you want to be rescued?                  21 Caller: My flat is engulfed in heavy smoke. This                  22 is unit 2307.                  23 999 Operator: We are fighting the fire at the                  24 scene. If you require assistance, then we will send                  25 firefighters to come to rescue you. Please stay on the</p>

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<p>1 line. How many are there in your flat?                  2 Caller: One.                  3 999 Operator: Yourself?                  4 Caller: Yes.                  5 999 Operator: How old are you?                  6 Caller: 67.                  7 999 Operator: 67?                  8 Caller: There is a lot of smoke. I'm going to pass                  9 out.                  10 999 Operator: We're trying to connect to the fire                  11 services.                  12 Caller: There is no alarm. There's nothing.                  13 999 Operator: You're in unit 2301?                  14 Caller: 2307.                  15 999 Operator: Yes. Wang Cheong House, one person.                  16 The FSD is very busy. Please stay on the line.                  17 Yes. Wang Cheong House, 2307.                  18 Caller: Wang Tai.                  19 999 Operator: You're in Wang Tai?                  20 Caller: Yes.                  21 FSD Operator: Wang Tai. The fire's got to you?                  22 Caller: There is a lot of smoke.                  23 FSD Operator: Do you want us to come to you?                  24 MR DAWES: First, it's confirmed that he could not hear the                  25 alarm. Secondly, from the time, we deduced that the</p>	<p>1 blocked them out. The passengers went between the                  2 ground floor and the individual floor several times.                  3 The next screenshot is 15:18:42. That's the 11th                  4 floor. It is clear that there was no smoke in the                  5 corridor.                  6 The next screenshot is the 23rd floor. When the                  7 lift doors opened, the lift was filled with smoke                  8 immediately, so that's the screenshots from the first                  9 video.                  10 The second video was filmed by CCTV in another lift                  11 in Wang Tai House. Let's look at the video at 15:14.                  12 (Video played)                  13 That's the 18th floor. The corridor was not filled                  14 with smoke yet. That's 15:14:02.                  15 15:14:19, the 15th floor, when the doors opened,                  16 there was already some smoke in the corridor.                  17 15:14:50, that's the ground floor. There was smoke                  18 but we could still see residents leaving the lifts.                  19 15:15:31 on the 27th floor when the doors opened,                  20 the corridor was still visible.                  21 A while later, 15:16:25, the 9th floor, there was                  22 smoke.                  23 20-odd seconds later, 15:16:49, when the doors                  24 opened on the ground floor, there was some smoke. There                  25 were individuals deciding to stay inside.</p>
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<p>1 999 call centre did not know that it was Wang Tai.                  2 There was confusion as to which block it was. This in                  3 turn affected the rescue.                  4 Mr Yiu, at about 11.40 pm on the 26th, was found in                  5 his flat. He was rescued. He is a survivor.                  6 At units 1606, Wang Tai House, a CCTV camera was                  7 installed. At 3.17 pm, from the CCTV footage, we could                  8 see that there was heavy smoke outside the corridor.                  9 This is the video footage. From the time stamp on the                  10 top-left corner, that's 15:16.                  11 (Video played)                  12 The angle show the perspective from inside the                  13 house. There was no smoke in the corridor yet.                  14 Let's move to 15:17. The corridor was filled with                  15 smoke. We have seen the videos from the 31st floor                  16 before 3.18. The heavy smoke spread from the corridor                  17 into the lobby. Later on, we will show two screenshots                  18 from two videos. We are concerned that it would cause                  19 discomfort of the audience. That's why we will not play                  20 the videos but we will invite the Committee to look at                  21 the screen captures. They show the time when smoke                  22 spread in the inside of the building. This is CCTV                  23 footage from a lift inside Wang Tai House. The time                  24 stamp is on the top-right corner. It's 3.17 pm.                  25 There were individuals in the lift but we have</p>	<p>1 When the lifts returned to the 18th floor at                  2 15:17:24, there was smoke in the corridor. Inside the                  3 lift, smoke began to thicken.                  4 15:18:04, when the doors opened on the 27th floor,                  5 smoke flooded the lift.                  6 40 seconds later when the lift returned to the                  7 ground floor, you can see that the lobby was filled with                  8 smoke.                  9 Finally, when the lift stopped at the 24th floor,                  10 that's 15:19:29, the smoke has entered the lift.                  11 The passengers of the lift, at 3.18, they decided                  12 not to leave via the ground floor of Wang Tai House. We                  13 believe that the fire has already spread to the ground                  14 floor of Wang Tai House, that's why the passengers chose                  15 to stay. Wang Tai House faced Wang Tai House. The main                  16 entrance of Wang Tai House was already untenable.                  17 We are now going to play CCTV footage filmed at the                  18 main entrance of Wang Tai House lobby.                  19 (Video played)                  20 Between 3.00 and 3.09, we can see residents leaving                  21 via the main entrance. Let's fast-forward it to save                  22 time.                  23 At 3.09 we can see fire or sparks reflected on the                  24 gate. The top right-hand corner of the metal gate, you                  25 can see a part which is brighter.</p>

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1 By 15:13, apparently there's more smoke. More  
 2 people left via the main entrance.  
 3 Now, this is the fireman Ho Wai Ho who passed away  
 4 later. He entered Wang Tai House at 3.15. At 15:18,  
 5 the last batch of residents left Wang Tai House via the  
 6 main entrance.  
 7 More people were leaving.  
 8 At 15:19 you can see that the flames have reached  
 9 the edge of this camera. So, combining the information  
 10 we have gathered from the footage, the corridor of  
 11 Wang Tai House began to be filled with smoke at 3.14.  
 12 At 3.18, at least on the 27th floor, residents could  
 13 not leave. The last batch of residents left by the main  
 14 entrance at 3.18.  
 15 At 2.52, when the first 999 call was made concerning  
 16 Wang Tai House, could more measures have been adopted to  
 17 evacuate the residents of Wang Tai House? Also, the  
 18 deactivated fire alarm has delayed the escape. We will  
 19 take the Committee to more evidence on that later on.  
 20 We move on to Wang Shing House. From the CCTV  
 21 footage, they start as early as 4.30 pm. At around 4 pm  
 22 there were still residents leaving Wang Shing House by  
 23 using the lifts.  
 24 We all know that the situation at Wang Shing House  
 25 was less serious. There was only one fatality.

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1 (Video played)  
 2 Let's move on to Wang Kin House. There were no  
 3 casualties at Wang Kin House. From the footage we could  
 4 see that the fire was less serious. By 4 pm there were  
 5 still residents leaving via the lifts. It seems that  
 6 the corridors were not filled with smoke yet.  
 7 (Video played)  
 8 At Wang Sun House, the footage start as early as  
 9 3.20 pm. That's the footage at the staircase. There  
 10 was no smoke in the staircase.  
 11 You could see that the gentleman was still able to  
 12 leave via the staircase. However, from post-fire  
 13 photos, the staircases near the open access were  
 14 completely burnt.  
 15 At around 3.50 pm, some of the corridors in Wang Sun  
 16 House were already filled with smoke. According to the  
 17 evidence from family members of the household, at 3.38,  
 18 she was still able to contact her mother. At the time,  
 19 there was smoke and she could not leave via the  
 20 staircase. Later on, at 3.52, she heard the fire alarm,  
 21 but there was no lift so she could not escape. At 4.27,  
 22 her brother and her were still able to have a video call  
 23 with the mother. There was smoke. Her mother used wet  
 24 towels to fill the door gaps and lower the temperature  
 25 inside, but at 4.30 she lost contact with her mother.

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1 There were two cases of death in Wang Sun House and one  
 2 of them was the mother in 1405.  
 3 (Video played)  
 4 For Wang Tao House, at least at 4 pm there was still  
 5 no smoke in the corridors. The CCTV footage stop at  
 6 16:09. That was about the time when the first call  
 7 about fire appeared Wang Tao House.  
 8 At 3.59 we can see a lady leaving the building via  
 9 the lifts. According to witness testimony, smoke began  
 10 to enter the flats at 4 pm. At the time, the column of  
 11 fire has already surrounded the building.  
 12 Flat 1304, the household, at 4 pm, he and his wife  
 13 saw smoke entering the flat from the door, so that's why  
 14 they closed the door and waited for rescue.  
 15 The survivor in flat 1704, she said when she and her  
 16 husband wanted to open the door and enter the corridor,  
 17 it was already filled with smoke and it was untenable so  
 18 they closed the door and called the police for help.  
 19 As we have mentioned earlier on, there were two  
 20 fatalities in Wang Tao House.  
 21 (Video played)  
 22 For Wang Yan House, at the initial stage of the  
 23 fire, it was relatively smoke-free. The CCTV footage  
 24 shows that it was only at 4.40 when the fire scaled up  
 25 the building via the light well. That's why the footage

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1 stopped. But there was no smoke in the corridor, so for  
 2 a long period of time residents were still able to reach  
 3 the ground floor at 5.09 through the lift.  
 4 Because of the chaotic situation, there may be some  
 5 discrepancies in the evidence concerning the time of  
 6 fire, but for units 1704, at 5.51 pm there was a call to  
 7 999 reporting that the father experienced difficulty  
 8 breathing inside the flat.  
 9 Now, the father was Mr Li Chen Pong. He was rescued  
 10 by firemen at 10.30 pm. There's one injured case in  
 11 Wang Yan House, with no fatality.  
 12 So the above is the crucial evidence given by  
 13 survivors concerning the time when smoke entered the  
 14 building on the same day. These may not be the exact  
 15 accurate times, but they are relatively accurate.  
 16 Concerning active fire safety measures in Wang Fuk  
 17 Court, the FSD provided an excerpt. These are the fire  
 18 hose system and the fire alarm system on each floor.  
 19 There is a fire alarm with a glass panel and also fire  
 20 hose which could be used by the residents. There's also  
 21 a valve on each floor connecting the fire hose reel to  
 22 the water tank on the top floor and there are fire  
 23 extinguishers on each floor. Actually, additional fire  
 24 extinguishers have been added to each alternate floor.  
 25 Unfortunately, evidence shows that most of the fire

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<p>1 service appliances were not operating normally. First                  2 of all, during the fire, the fire hose system has been                  3 deactivated. The water tank providing water to the                  4 water hose has run out of water.                  5 The responsibility and liability concerning that, we                  6 will explore the evidence later on.                  7 On that day, according to evidence, there were some                  8 residents who tried to use the fire hose. However, from                  9 online videos, we can see that the fire hose didn't                  10 work. This is a video footage from online.                  11 (Video played)                  12 VIDEO RECORDING: Resident: I am the property owner of                  13 a flat in Wang Kin House, flat D.                  14 Narrator: The video footage shows what happened                  15 20 minutes after the fire. It shows that the fire alarm                  16 didn't work, there was no water to the fire hose, and                  17 the lady was trying to alert her neighbour during the                  18 fire.                  19 The video was filmed from the entrance to Ms Fung's                  20 flat so we have blurred out the face of Ms Fung.                  21 However, we have not edited the video given to us by                  22 Ms Fung.                  23 Please pay attention to the time stamp. It is                  24 15:15:34 on 26 November. The fire started at 2.51 at                  25 Wang Cheong House. Ms Fung tried to press the doorbell</p>	<p>1 those fire service installations that have failed and                  2 that has somehow delayed their evacuation.                  3 Now I'd like to talk about the fire alarm system.                  4 According to information during the fire, only the fire                  5 alarm system of block C, Wang Shing House, and Wang Yan                  6 House, block A, had the fire alarm system activated.                  7 I assess the property management agency employee,                  8 Mr Lam Man Yan, in his evidence stated when he came to                  9 be aware of the fire he broke the glass of the fire                  10 alarm system and he found that it was not in operation                  11 and he activated the manual switch of the fire hydrant                  12 of Wang Yan House and he could hear the fire alarm, and                  13 then he went to the pump house of Wang Yan House, Wang                  14 Shing House. He wanted to activate the manual main                  15 switch. First he went to Wang Yan House and then                  16 Wang Shing House. Both fire alarm systems were                  17 activated successfully. However, that of Wang Tao House                  18 could not be activated.                  19 Then he tried to activate the fire alarm system in                  20 Wang Kin House but because of the fire he was stopped by                  21 a policeman.                  22 It can be noticed that from Mr Lam's evidence,                  23 before Mr Lam's intervention, the fire alarm system of                  24 the three houses he had visited were closed or switched                  25 off.</p>
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<p>1 to alert her neighbours to escape but there was no                  2 response. At the time, the fire has already escalated                  3 to number 3 alarm. Wang Kin House and Wang Cheong House                  4 are only one building apart.                  5 The second video footage, 3.18 pm, Ms Fung and                  6 another gentleman tried to activate the fire hose. They                  7 were trying to figure out how it worked. They pulled                  8 out the fire hose and tried to activate it. They knew                  9 there was a fire, but they chose to stay despite the                  10 fear. They wanted to stop the fire from spreading.                  11 The third video footage, the time was 3.21. The                  12 lady in green and also the gentleman were still trying                  13 to activate the fire hose. The gentleman said it didn't                  14 work. The lady crawled into the space trying to                  15 activate the fire house. In most buildings in Hong                  16 Kong, even if the fire alarm has been deactivated, the                  17 fire hose should still work. However, that's not the                  18 case.                  19 The fourth video, 3.24 pm. This gentleman reached                  20 this floor via the staircase. He broke the glass of the                  21 fire alarm but there was no sound. No alarm was heard.                  22 MR DAWES: Chair and members of the Committee, the fire                  23 service installations failed. That led to implications                  24 and there is responsibility to be determined. We can                  25 see from the footage the residents tried to activate</p>	<p>1 As for the time of activation of the fire alarm                  2 system of Wang Sun House, we know that it could not be                  3 earlier than 3.20 because from the sound recording of                  4 the CCTV, we could not hear any fire alarm.                  5 And then evidence from a witness showed that at 3.23                  6 or after 3.23, the fire alarm system of Wang Sun House                  7 did operate for a while. We received phone call from                  8 a certain Mr Cheng and he said that at around 3.23 pm he                  9 received a call from his family member, he came to learn                  10 of the fire, he asked his family member not to fear and                  11 he should return to the flat and take his bank books and                  12 also deeds, et cetera. Evidence shows that when he was                  13 fetching such item, the fire alarm system of Wang Sun                  14 House could be heard and we work out the time according                  15 to this evidence.                  16 As for whether the fire alarm system of Wang Yan                  17 House was activated, there were conflicting evidence                  18 from evidence of a number of residents of Wang Yan House                  19 showed that they could hear the fire alarm. This is in                  20 line with the evidence by Mr Lam Man Yan but we have                  21 WhatsApp messages provided by the police showing that at                  22 3.27 pm, some residents heard the fire alarm of Wang Yan                  23 House.                  24 Evidence from the FSD was that 4 pm of the same day,                  25 when Wang Yan House was checked, it could not be</p>

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<p>1 activated. When we take evidence at a later stage, we 2 will explore this matter. As regards other houses, it 3 was clear there was no fire alarm activated on the day 4 of the fire.</p> <p>5 According to the evidence of a number of residents, 6 they said that they tried to activate the fire alarm 7 system but to no avail. We have just seen the situation 8 on the 15th floor of Wang Cheong House, how people tried 9 to activate the fire alarm. So only Mr Lam succeeded in 10 activating the fire alarms of two houses. The fire 11 alarm system of other houses were not operating or were 12 closed. This is because the main switch was off at that 13 moment. The responsibility of the contractor and other 14 parties will be delineated at a later stage.</p> <p>15 Before we leave this subject, may I say that we're 16 going to explore with the FSD for the main power switch, 17 it was not switched on, could the fire alarm system be 18 working? We expect the FSD to give us some 19 enlightenment in this regard.</p> <p>20 Chair and members of the Committee, now I'd like to 21 turn to evidence from the FSD on the emergency response, 22 how they deployed their operation after they received 23 the first call. As we heard this morning, at 2.50 they 24 received the first 999 call, and at 2.51, seven 25 firefighting appliances were deployed, three pump</p>	<p>1 At 5 pm there were three ladder trucks spraying 2 water over the fire.</p> <p>3 At 6.22 of the same day, the fire was raised to 4 a number 5 alarm, the first since 2008. Evidence from 5 the FSD was that until 10.30, 174 appliances and 6 47 support vehicles were dispatched, involving 989 7 firefighters, the nine times required for a number 5 8 alarm fire. The police also went to help. The first 9 batch of police arrived at 2.59.</p> <p>10 As for emergency calls evidence from the FSD and the 11 police was that on that day they received 406 12 999 emergency calls related to the fire. Most calls 13 came in between 3 and 4 pm. There were 111 of them. 14 During the fire, the FSD handled 373 independent calls. 15 59 people were saved and 100 corpses were removed.</p> <p>16 At the evidential hearing we will further explore 17 these matters. However, there are already some points 18 of concern that are worthy to note. The first area 19 involves evacuation and means of notification of the 20 fire to residents. We have reviewed a questionnaire 21 submitted by 1,400 residents. 20 per cent of the 22 450 units were informed of a fire by neighbours in the 23 first instance. About 130 of the units, that is about 24 25 per cent of them, were informed of the fire by family 25 members. About 100 units or 20 per cent of the</p>
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<p>1 stations, two rescue stations and two 37-metre turntable 2 appliances from Ma On Shan and also Tai Po fire 3 stations.</p> <p>4 This emergency response was four fire engines were 5 dispatched. In this particular case of Wang Fuk Court, 6 because repair work or maintenance works was carrying 7 on, the fire station activated their emergency response 8 very early on. So instead of two, they dispatched four 9 fire appliances there. They were aware of the fact that 10 the fire hydrant and hose reel system was deactivated. 11 They deployed another pump appliances.</p> <p>12 So at 2.56 to 3.01, the fire engines arrived one by 13 one. At 2.54, the FSD deployed an extra five fire 14 engines. At 2.56 the first engines arrived at the site 15 of the fire and the fire also spread to the 10th floor.</p> <p>16 At 3.02 of the same day, the fire was raised to 17 a number 3 alarm. At 3.11, that is nine minutes 18 afterwards. We have this footage. We can see how fire 19 engines have arrived at this location.</p> <p>20 (Video played)</p> <p>21 VIDEO RECORDING: Wang Fuk Court is on fire. 22 MR DAWES: We can see that fire appliances are located at 23 different spots of the street and then they started 24 firefighting. At 3.34, the fire was raised to 25 a number 4 alarm.</p>	<p>1 residents saw the fire themselves or heard sounds of 2 explosions, they smelled the odour before they found out 3 there was a fire. Only 40 residents were informed of 4 the fire through the fire alarm system. 30 residents 5 were informed by the siren of fire appliances.</p> <p>6 Evidence showed that the PMA, ISS, tried to use 7 handheld loudspeakers to inform residents in the area 8 between Wang Yan and Wang Tao House, that was done, but 9 that was not done for other houses.</p> <p>10 We have reviewed 450 questionnaires. Only one 11 resident stated that he was made aware of the fire 12 through the loudspeaker. Members of the public and the 13 media also have asked this question, whether the police 14 should use the emergency alert system to send messages 15 to mobile phones.</p> <p>16 Members may recall that during COVID-19 most of us 17 or all of us have received that message once. 18 Government response was the incident did not fall in the 19 criteria for using that system. At the evidential 20 hearing we will explore whether that was a legitimate 21 reason and whether there are other means to inform 22 residents earlier on of the fire so that they could 23 evacuate earlier.</p> <p>24 Another area of concern is the handling of 25 999 calls. We have heard some recordings of a few</p>

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<p>1 999 calls. From the calls, we learned that when members 2 of the public called 999, the police and FSD would have 3 tripartite conference call. We heard from the recording 4 that calls were diverted to the FSD. Evidence shows 5 that initially the call centre of the FSD naturally 6 received a large number of calls. Some of them had to 7 wait for four minutes, but then the calls were not 8 answered. Of course that would impact on the 9 firefighting evacuation operation.</p> <p>10 The third area of concern is the firefighting 11 process. There were queries whether we have sufficient 12 resource, but in Hong Kong, the first ladder could only 13 reach 50 metres, only half of the height of Wang Fuk 14 Court buildings. Should more aerial ladders be 15 deployed? Of course that is a question and we can see 16 that most of the sparks and flashes were greater in 17 number than the number of water jets trying to put down 18 the fire.</p> <p>19 The evidence from FSD is going to be crucial.</p> <p>20 Chair, allow me to spend a few more minutes to 21 complete the last part of my statement for this morning.</p> <p>22 The last issue we will cover this morning is 23 a rather heavy issue, that is about the firefighter 24 Mr Ho. We are all very much saddened by his passing 25 away and we would like to express our greatest respect</p>	<p>1 that he leaves the lift on the 25th floor of Wang Tai 2 House.</p> <p>3 I'd like to clarify that there are three lifts in 4 each block. They stop at every three floors. The first 5 one serves the first floor and the second one serves the 6 4th floor and up. That's how it works. According to 7 the evidence of the FSD, the clip showing Mr Ho is the 8 last clip of him that they have. According to 9 regulations, firefighters will not take the lift to go 10 up to the floor where rescue is needed because that is 11 dangerous. We have mentioned that there was a call for 12 rescue on the 27th floor. That's why he left the lift 13 on the 25th floor, which is in line with the code.</p> <p>14 Mr Ho thought that he was going to conduct a rescue 15 on the 27th floor at Wang Cheung House, but at that 16 time, because of the confusion, he was actually in 17 Wang Tai House. He left the lift on the 25th floor. At 18 around 3.22, that is seven minutes after the image we 19 just looked at, a rescue alert was received. Evidence 20 shows that through the communications channel, Mr Ho 21 said, "Mayday, Mayday, I am Shatin Sai Cheung 22 number 1846, I am trapped on the 30th floor." He did 23 not mention the name of the block, which caused some 24 difficulties.</p> <p>25 At 3.55 he was found in the open space at Wang Tai</p>
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<p>1 for the bravery he displayed in the firefighting 2 operation.</p> <p>3 We have got some information on the last whereabouts 4 of his operation. Mr Ho Wai Ho, aged 37, was in Shatin 5 fire station, belonging to Sai Cheung team 9. He was 6 one of the earliest firefighters dispatched. Shatin Sai 7 Cheung team was deployed to Wang Fuk Court at 2.51. 8 They arrived in 10 minutes. We have footage showing how 9 Mr Ho Wai Ho and two firefighters were deployed to 10 flat 207 of Wang Cheung House to conduct a rescue 11 operation. In the process, they passed the bike parking 12 area of Wang Tai House. The red circle is where the 13 CCTV footage we're going to see was made.</p> <p>14 (Video played)</p> <p>15 At 3:13:25 we saw firefighters passing by at around 16 that time. More firefighters. We saw the last 17 firefighter entering or turning right together with 18 colleagues at 15:13:50.</p> <p>19 At 15:15 we saw a firefighter. We believe he was 20 the third firefighter, Mr Ho Wai Ho, we saw in the last 21 footage.</p> <p>22 From the CCTV footage, we can see one firefighter. 23 You see that in this left hand there is a metal hammer. 24 He entered the lift. The mark on his helmet says "ST", 25 which means Shatin. At that time -- you will see later</p>	<p>1 House. He was sent to the Prince of Wales Hospital. He 2 was certified dead at 4.41 pm. When he was found, he 3 was in his uniform and his helmet. His left-hand 4 gauntlet and his boots were missing. At that time he 5 was not wearing a breathing apparatus nor mask. The 6 hammer you saw in the image was missing. There were 7 multiple burns on his body. The left glove, the 8 breathing apparatus, the mask and the apparatus was 9 found on the 31st floor. It's somewhere near a broken 10 scaffolding outside. The boot was found at another 11 location at Wang Tai House. It was destroyed.</p> <p>12 Autopsy showed that he breathed in an excessive 13 amount of carbon monoxide; there were multiple fractures 14 and lacerations. At this stage, we are unable to 15 ascertain why he was found in the open space of Wang Tai 16 House, but evidence shows that at 3.55 he was on the 17 25th floor. A little bit later, he was found on the 18 30th floor.</p> <p>19 At 3.55, the condition in Wang Tai House was 20 serious. Firefighter Mr Ho Wai Ho took off his glove 21 and breathing apparatus. He broke the window on the 22 31st floor and tried to leave. He fell to his death. 23 The condition he was facing was difficult. In the 24 course of the fact-finding exercise, the Commission may 25 make some fact-findings in relation to his death.</p>

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<p>1 On behalf of the Committee and the FSD, we express 2 our condolences to his family. 3 This will be a suitable time for us to break for 4 lunch. 5 CHAIRMAN: We will continue in the afternoon. It's a heavy 6 morning. We learned about the reconstruction of what 7 happened. Everyone was serious in their work. You 8 heard about the measures to fight the fire and to 9 respond to the fire. It might affect people but we need 10 to find the evidence. The Committee's investigation is 11 comprehensive and open but it may affect certain 12 individuals. We ask you to be brave in the course of 13 finding the truth. We ask you to be courageous. We 14 will do our utmost to find out what happened. 15 We have overrun. Do you need more time? 16 MR DAWES: No. 17 CHAIRMAN: Then we will reconvene at 2.15. 18 (1.06 pm) 19 (The luncheon adjournment) 20 (2.15 pm) 21 CHAIRMAN: Mr Dawes, please continue. 22 MR DAWES: This afternoon we will focus on the 23 responsibilities and roles of various parties, in 24 particular whether the maintenance work observed 25 relevant rules and regulations, whether the works are</p>	<p>1 construction materials, scaffolding, foam board, fire 2 service installations, including fire alarm, fire 3 hydrant, hose reel system, means of escape, that is the 4 staircase. These inadequacies and breaches, we will 5 look into whether they are the main cause of the 6 significant casualties. 7 Of course, for some areas, we rely on the evidence 8 of experts for further analysis. In due course, these 9 experts will give evidence. We have laid out the 10 preliminary observations of the task force, that is the 11 cause of the fire is probably a lit cigarette. We 12 cannot speak with certainty whether this is the cause, 13 but construction site safety is an important matter. 14 Residents of Wang Fuk Court lodged complaints on various 15 occasions. The issue has not been properly dealt with. 16 Evidence shows that the contractor has laid down 17 regulations to prohibit smoking. However, the 18 prohibition has not been observed. 19 There are indeed photographs showing that no smoking 20 signs have been put up in the construction site, and 21 also the penalties have been specified. For the first 22 offence, it would be a fine of \$1,000 and the first 23 warning. For the second offence, the offender would be 24 sacked. And the contractor has said that they have 25 reminded the construction workers on multiple occasions</p>
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<p>1 properly supervised to make sure that they are in 2 compliance with existing rules and regulations. In 3 addition, we will also look at the adequacy of the 4 supervisory mechanism of such work. 5 I do believe that I have to repeat the situation at 6 that time. 7 During the fire, residents of Wang Fuk Court -- 8 before the fire, the residents of Wang Fuk Court had 9 been living in a flat that is wrapped in scaffolding net 10 as well as foam boards. They have lodged complaints on 11 various occasions against workers smoking at the site. 12 We will hear information about their complaints, tests 13 that the residents have done. 14 We have to stand in their shoes to see whether the 15 complaints lodged were reasonable and how these 16 complaints were handled. Of course different 17 departments have their own considerations. They will 18 have sufficient opportunity to explain their situation. 19 You may recall we have pointed out in the direction 20 conference that, according to our preliminary analysis, 21 a series of unacceptable systemic problems have been 22 found. These cannot be ignored. 23 In my opening address I will touch on 24 non-compliance, systemic problems, as well as systemic 25 non-compliances. That covers smoking at the site,</p>	<p>1 about the danger of smoking. These are the WhatsApp 2 records showing that indeed some workers have been 3 fined. 4 Besides ensuring that there is no smoking on the 5 construction site by Will Power and Prestige, there is 6 also the property management company, that is ISS 7 EastPoint Properties. According to the security 8 guidelines of the company, one of the tasks of security 9 guards is to prevent and detect potential fire risks. 10 Concerning the evidence given by ISS concerning the 11 no smoking rule, according to Ms Cheng Chi Ying's 12 evidence statement, paragraphs 36 to 41, she mentioned 13 the following: first, upon receipt of complaint of 14 smoking from Wang Fuk Court residents, the ISS will 15 notify Prestige to handle the complaint, and that's 16 indeed what happened, according to the record. If ISS 17 discovered smoking by workers, ISS would ask the worker 18 to cease smoking immediately and also ISS would put up 19 notices to remind the workers of the no smoking rule. 20 Ms Cheng also mentioned a point worth noting. The 21 ISS staff has notified Prestige that smoking has been 22 ongoing on the construction site and the issue has been 23 brought up in various construction site management 24 meetings. 25 According to the evidence, the no smoking rule at</p>

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<p>1 the construction site has not been complied with on many                  2 occasions. For instance, we have found cigarette butts                  3 in the remnant of the light well and also we have seen                  4 workers smoking from the CCTV footages. Also, there                  5 were records of complaints from the residents.                  6 These are photographs downloaded from the social                  7 media network. These are photos uploaded by the                  8 residents themselves showing workers smoking on the                  9 scaffolding outside of their homes.                  10 (Video played)                  11 Some residents even took video showing construction                  12 site workers smoking on the scaffolding.                  13 VIDEO RECORDING: Hey, sir, are you smoking again?                  14 MR DAWES: According to Mr Kong Cheung Fat's evidence,                  15 Wang Fuk Court residents have uploaded some photos on an                  16 exchange group among Wang Fuk Court residents. Mr Kong                  17 is a member of the 11th and 12th incorporated owners.                  18 So these are the records he referred to.                  19 Naturally, the complaints have reached the                  20 government, in particular the Labour Department. For                  21 instance, a complaint has been lodged through the                  22 Occupational Safety and Health platform on 20 July 2024.                  23 If you look at the second page of the complaint                  24 form, it says construction site workers smoked during                  25 work blatantly disregard of Fire Safety Ordinance and</p>	<p>1 a video showing that there were a large number of                  2 cigarette butts in the staircase of Wang Shing House.                  3 To get a better understanding of the complaint                  4 I have mentioned, I submit to the Committee the relevant                  5 supervisory frame work on no smoking ban. According to                  6 cap 59I, Construction Sites (Safety) Ordinance, 53(1),                  7 the director of labour may issue a written order to ban                  8 smoking or use unsheltered fire on construction site.                  9 And when there are flammable liquids like paint stored                  10 on construction sites and also other dangerous objects                  11 on the construction site, only when there are dangerous                  12 goods on the construction site will the director of                  13 labour issue such an order.                  14 The director has never issued such an order on                  15 Wang Fuk Court. Mr Li Man Pong, a witness, in                  16 paragraph 44 of his witness statement, said that it                  17 would be very rare for the no smoking order to be                  18 issued.                  19 Ms Lam Sau Ching, a witness from Labour Department,                  20 in paragraph 96 of her statement, the smoking issue at                  21 Wang Fuk Court has not reached the threshold of a no                  22 smoking order being issued.                  23 Altogether, the Labour Department has paid 16 visits                  24 to Wang Fuk Court. During these 16 inspections,                  25 officers of Labour Department said that they had never</p>
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<p>1 put the safety of the residents at risk. The                  2 Labour Department has received other complaints                  3 concerning the work, in particular about workers smoking                  4 on scaffolding on the following days, for example, in                  5 year 2024, 1 and 14 August, 16, 18 and 19 October,                  6 24 February 2025, 30 April, 11 and 12 November last                  7 year --                  8 CHAIRMAN: Mr Victor Dawes, will you provide us with a list                  9 of the dates of the complaints in the future?                  10 MR DAWES: We do have a list but --                  11 CHAIRMAN: You don't have to submit the list to us now.                  12 MR DAWES: We have prepared lists already.                  13 Now, the Independent Checking Unit of the Housing                  14 Department, that is the ICU, which will be referred to                  15 in the future, a number of complaints have been recorded                  16 concerning workers smoking in October 2024 up to                  17 June 2025. The police has also provided us with the                  18 WhatsApp record obtained between the contractors.                  19 Since July 2024, in the span of one and a half year,                  20 according to the record in the group, on more than 80                  21 occasions it was mentioned that there were complaints                  22 about construction site workers smoking in the                  23 construction site on average once per week. In fact, on                  24 the very day of the fire, 2.45 pm, according to the                  25 WhatsApp group between Prestige and Will Power, there is</p>	<p>1 seen any worker smoking on the scaffolding. They have                  2 made numerous conclusion that those complaints were not                  3 substantiated or could not be justified.                  4 Let me give you several examples. On 20 July 2024,                  5 a complaint was made. On 22 July, the Labour Department                  6 has paid a visit to the site. According to the internal                  7 memorandum of the Labour Department, there is the                  8 finding of the inspector. Paragraph 3:                  9 "During visit, the site was in partial operation                  10 with 9 workers engaged in scaffolding work at block G.                  11 Inspection was conducted in company of Mr Hau ...                  12 director ... Ms Yung ... So, Mr Tam, foreman, and                  13 Mr Fung, CP for scaffolding work. The safety condition                  14 of the site was generally acceptable. However, safety                  15 matters were duly reminded to them on the spot."                  16 If you look at page 4, you can see that the findings                  17 were that:                  18 "No workers were found smoking on the site during                  19 visit.                  20 No cigarette stubs were found at the complained                  21 location.                  22 No flammable substances/materials were found on the                  23 site.                  24 Flammable substances/materials were not necessary to                  25 be used for scaffolding work which was the only work</p>

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<p>1 being carried out on the site at the current stage.                  2 Fire extinguishers and fire hoses were provided."                  3 That is why the report's findings was that the                  4 complaint could not be substantiated. Further reply was                  5 given and the complainant basically was satisfied with                  6 the reply.                  7 It is worth noting that the complainant has actually                  8 provided a photo of a worker actually smoking on the                  9 scaffolding although the labour officer did not see with                  10 their own eyes that there were smokers, but it doesn't                  11 mean the complaint was not real.                  12 Another complaint was on 8 August 2024. A visit was                  13 also paid to Wang Fuk Court. Ms Lam Sau Ching from the                  14 Labour Department sent a letter to the complainant.                  15 This is the email you see on the screen. The very last                  16 paragraph, it says:                  17 "The Labour Department is responsible for enforcing                  18 the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance ... the                  19 Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance ... and                  20 their subsidiary regulations to safeguard the                  21 occupational safety and health of employees at work.                  22 However, public safety matters do fall within the scope                  23 of application of the above regulations. If there are                  24 any issues involving public safety, please contact the                  25 relevant departments for follow-up."</p>	<p>1 complainant can do. According to Ms Lam's reply,                  2 although it doesn't fully reflect the Labour                  3 Department's follow-up action, and also the Labour                  4 Department stance -- let's look at the findings of the                  5 visit. Again it says:                  6 "-- No workers were found smoking ...                  7 -- No cigarette stubs were found ...                  8 -- No flammable substances ..."                  9 Finally, according to Mr Tam, the foreman, the                  10 contractor has rules in place to deal with the situation                  11 that we find for the first time, and the second time                  12 would mean that the worker would not be allowed to work.                  13 16 such instances have occurred. After every inspection                  14 by the Labour Department, the findings were that all                  15 complaints were not substantiated. Regrettably, the                  16 Labour Department dealt with the case in the same manner                  17 each time. It seems that the Labour Department's stance                  18 was that it was under the remit of the FSD.                  19 Of course we have also seen the reply from the FSD.                  20 At this stage we can't say for sure the fire was                  21 definitely caused by smoking and cigarette stubs, but                  22 the risk of smoking at construction sites is apparent.                  23 This is something we have to address. For contractors                  24 and government departments, after the incident, we                  25 understand that there is more oversight on the no</p>
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<p>1 In other words, after referring to the relevant                  2 ordinances, the Labour Department's stance is that they                  3 need to ensure the occupational safety and health of                  4 employees at work; however, public safety matters do not                  5 fall within the scope of the above legislations, so for                  6 any related issues, please contact the relevant                  7 department.                  8 Of course, Ms Lam did not mention which department                  9 the complainant should make contact with. Even at this                  10 juncture, we cannot say for sure which departments would                  11 be responsible for the matter. For example, on 22 July                  12 2024, the Labour Department referred the relevant                  13 complaint to the Fire Services Department with the note                  14 that the complaint relates to public safety. On that                  15 date, the FSD sent an email reply as shown on the                  16 screen:                  17 "Please be informed that the subject matter is not                  18 under the jurisdiction of FSD. You may wish to refer                  19 the case to the relevant department."                  20 It means that "This case does not fall within the                  21 remit of the FSD. Please refer the case to the relevant                  22 department."                  23 If Labour Department is not responsible for the                  24 public safety issue caused by smoking on scaffolding,                  25 nor does the FSD, I believe there is not much the</p>	<p>1 smoking rule afterwards. However, smoking at                  2 construction sites should never have been neglected. We                  3 are pleased to see in the opening submission from the                  4 government counsel that the Labour Department is now                  5 seeking to introduce legislation amendments to impose                  6 full smoking ban on construction sites and there will be                  7 a penalty and fine system. The Committee may consider                  8 whether this is a sound policy and whether this is                  9 sufficient. So that's so much about smoking.                  10 Next I will move on to the construction materials                  11 used in the large-scale maintenance work in Wang Fuk                  12 Court. According to our terms of reference, the                  13 Committee should review the existing construction                  14 material list and its comprehensiveness and also whether                  15 the existing certification and testing system is                  16 sufficient. So we need to see if there are shortcomings                  17 in the existing system. There are two categories of                  18 construction materials. First of all, construction                  19 materials which will form part of the building after                  20 structural works, that's permanent construction                  21 materials. The second category is material used for                  22 works but do not form part of the building. These are                  23 temporary. As temporary, ancillary materials, like                  24 scaffolding, scaffolding nets and boards.                  25 There are two systems, including minor works and</p>

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<p>1 exempted works. For permanent materials, under the  2 minor works system, and also non-standard minor works,  3 for standard modern works, when building high-rise  4 building, when we demolish a building or when there are  5 major alteration or addition to a building, for these  6 works the law has imposed a very stringent system on the  7 construction materials.  8 So this an approval and consent system. Under this  9 system, prescribed building professionals, or PBPs, and  10 registered contractors, or RCs, they need to formulate  11 detailed plans and specify all the relevant construction  12 materials involving safety, for example, steel bar  13 structures and concrete. These plans have to be  14 submitted to the Building Authority, that is the  15 Director of Housing, for approval.  16 On the part of the contractors, before approval is  17 given by the authority, in theory, no work should start.  18 After approval is given, the law requires that two  19 categories of private registered professionals must  20 exercise stringent oversight on the works. They must  21 also sign off the project to ensure that the laws have  22 been complied with.  23 For the RC, that is the contractors themselves who  24 would conduct the work themselves, that includes  25 authorised persons, structural architects and structural</p>	<p>1 the government. The documents are for filing purpose  2 and for random checking in the future to see whether  3 they are in order.  4 The Minor Works Control Scheme relies on  5 self-discipline on the part of registered contractors.  6 For the registered inspectors, RI, you have heard of  7 this term many times recently, and RC, the registered  8 contractor, have to bear the main responsibility to  9 ensure that the materials used are in order and that  10 they comply with the Buildings Ordinance.  11 The government will not approve each and every  12 document submitted. The government relies on random  13 checking and audit to address the relevant issues.  14 There would be a basic audit check by means of  15 examination of documents to ensure that the plans and  16 the photos are submitted and consistent and if  17 irregularities are found upon visits, then notices will  18 be issued for rectification. If these notices are  19 ignored, that can lead to prosecution.  20 We've got another type of works, so-called exempted  21 works. It involves the simplest way of approval in  22 accordance with section 41(3) of the Buildings  23 Ordinance. If the building works is carried out in the  24 interior of the building and doesn't involve the  25 structure, then it can be regarded as exempted works.</p>
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<p>1 geo engineers. They need to submit regular reports to  2 make sure that the contractors have been working  3 according to the approved plans and safety rules.  4 After completion of new buildings, RCs and PBPs need  5 to sign a certificate to the effect that the building  6 has fully complied with the approved work plan and thus  7 the structures are safe.  8 On the other hand, the abovementioned procedures can  9 be compared to our minor works control system. These  10 \$303 million worth of maintenance projects of Wang Fuk  11 Court is regarded as exempted works so it can bypass the  12 standards applicable to major works, so the approval and  13 consent system just mentioned does not apply.  14 The Minor Works Control Scheme was introduced in  15 2010. The intention was to streamline procedures to  16 help owners to address safety issues and to carry out  17 minor works expeditiously and for fast approval. The  18 features are the contractor doesn't have to wait for the  19 Buildings authority to approve the relevant plans before  20 works start. This is in the Building (Minor Works)  21 Regulation section 204 stated.  22 Now, for the choice and use of buildings works,  23 there was no approval of acting by the government  24 required. The contractors need only to use statutory  25 forms and submit pictures and technical plans to notify</p>	<p>1 This is different from minor works in the sense that the  2 owners do not have to employ registered architects,  3 engineers or registered contractors to carry out the  4 works. The contractor doesn't have to submitted any  5 forms, plans or notice to the ICU or Buildings Authority  6 before, in the course or after the works.  7 Let's take a look at the situation at Wang Fuk  8 Court. In this case, the core part of the renovation  9 project includes removing the old tiles, concrete on the  10 facade, repair the concrete, waterproof, tiling and to  11 add tiles to the facade of the building, mosaic tiles.  12 Although the project cost \$303 million and the project  13 has wide implications on residents, the government still  14 rely on the documents of the registered inspector in the  15 finding that they should be treated at minor works and  16 exempted works. So the project was regulated as minor  17 works and exempted works.  18 Under the system, of course documents have to be  19 submitted. 48 valid minor works submissions were  20 submitted. They can be divided into two types. There  21 are type II or class II minor works. They include most  22 of the works. The contractor will remove the old  23 covering materials of the facade and lay new mosaic and  24 files, repair the concrete and repair the external  25 drains. Forms have been submitted as required by</p>

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<p>1 class II minor works.</p> <p>2 So there are works regarded as class I minor works,</p> <p>3 they are high-risk in nature. They include alterations</p> <p>4 to the windows on the staircases of Wang Fuk Court.</p> <p>5 The ICU is the statutory regulator of Wang Fuk Court</p> <p>6 based on the following justifications. Wang Fuk Court</p> <p>7 was built by the Housing Authority as a Home Ownership</p> <p>8 Scheme building. Under section 41(1)(a) of the</p> <p>9 Buildings Ordinance, the Buildings Authority in building</p> <p>10 housing is exempt from the regulation of the Buildings</p> <p>11 Ordinance, and the Buildings Department is not involved</p> <p>12 in the design and construction of the Wang Fuk HOS.</p> <p>13 However, when the flats are sold in the market, the flat</p> <p>14 will come under the regulation of the Buildings</p> <p>15 Ordinance.</p> <p>16 However, on an enforcement level, the responsibility</p> <p>17 of enforcement will not be transferred to the Buildings</p> <p>18 Authority. Rather, the BA will delegate ICU of the</p> <p>19 Housing Department to be responsible.</p> <p>20 So when it comes to the statutory regulation of</p> <p>21 Wang Fuk Court, ICU still holds the responsibility. The</p> <p>22 responsibility doesn't rest on the Buildings Authority.</p> <p>23 It is responsible for monitoring works, for submission</p> <p>24 of plans and to audit approved projects.</p> <p>25 However, the BD is still responsible for prosecution</p>	<p>1 fire, ICU changed its practice.</p> <p>2 This shows therefore alteration of the windows of</p> <p>3 the staircase, that is class I minor works, in</p> <p>4 submission of plans, ICU did not know that BD had</p> <p>5 changed its policy, requiring on-site inspection by the</p> <p>6 ICU and so the ICU only had desktop vetting of the</p> <p>7 documents.</p> <p>8 Apart from responding to complaints by residents,</p> <p>9 they have never visited the site for inspection.</p> <p>10 I think the problem is obvious. This morning we dwelled</p> <p>11 at length on the question of the means of escape.</p> <p>12 I think the opening was probably a result of the</p> <p>13 alteration of the windows. Now, we talked about</p> <p>14 temporary building materials used during the works.</p> <p>15 Evidence shows that for evidence used in the Wang Fuk</p> <p>16 Court case, many of them were combustible: scaffolding,</p> <p>17 the scaffolding nets, the toe-boards, the canvases, the</p> <p>18 nylon strips and also foam boards, such materials are</p> <p>19 called "temporary" because, after the works is</p> <p>20 completed, they will be removed.</p> <p>21 We will explore the use of these materials like</p> <p>22 plastic boards, foam boards and scaffolding nets,</p> <p>23 et cetera. We will discuss the fire-retardancy</p> <p>24 requirements of some materials.</p> <p>25 As far as we understand, there is no specific</p>
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<p>1 under the Buildings Ordinance and to regulate RIs and</p> <p>2 RCs. So the two departments have different</p> <p>3 responsibilities.</p> <p>4 And the consequences in the project involving</p> <p>5 Wang Fuk Court, ICU had never on-site inspection of the</p> <p>6 works. Their visits would tackle specific complaints</p> <p>7 made by residents, for instance, involving the</p> <p>8 scaffolding nets. According to evidence from ICU, the</p> <p>9 purpose of visits before works -- well, actually there</p> <p>10 were only 25 per year, accounting for 0.1 per cent of</p> <p>11 the total number of plans submitted under minor works.</p> <p>12 This is again the guideline for the Buildings</p> <p>13 Ordinance. In 2023, the Buildings Department reviewed</p> <p>14 its internal manual for regulation. They have adopted</p> <p>15 more stringent approach. For class I minor works, the</p> <p>16 BD will inspect the sites and randomly check at least</p> <p>17 20 per cent of the cases for safety checks. Evidence</p> <p>18 from ICU shows that the Building Department has never</p> <p>19 informed the ICU of this major change in its policy.</p> <p>20 Basically, ICU was still carrying out its duty according</p> <p>21 to the previous arrangement, so ICU was of the view that</p> <p>22 it was the BD's responsibility.</p> <p>23 So what happened is, after the Wang Fuk fire, on</p> <p>24 22 December 2025, ICU formally received notification of</p> <p>25 inspections; in other words, about one month after the</p>	<p>1 requirement on the type of -- fire-retardancy standards</p> <p>2 required. While there are no specific standards, the</p> <p>3 temporary materials of course use there must comply with</p> <p>4 general safety standards. Under cap 123Q, part 8 of the</p> <p>5 Buildings Regulation, covering of the facade must be</p> <p>6 non-combustible and also, paragraph 16 requires that in</p> <p>7 carrying out works the contractor has to use the</p> <p>8 appropriate method and procedures and must take</p> <p>9 appropriate preventive measures. Breaching of the</p> <p>10 regulation can attract enforcement on the part of the</p> <p>11 Buildings Department, including cease to work order</p> <p>12 under section 23 of the Ordinance, and section 40 of the</p> <p>13 Ordinance can also lead to criminal prosecution of the</p> <p>14 contractor and the parties involved. There can also be</p> <p>15 disciplinary sanctions against professionals involved.</p> <p>16 Under section 42A, anyone directly involved, any</p> <p>17 registered contractors or professionals involved who</p> <p>18 allow or approve the use of improper materials or</p> <p>19 materials that do not comply with this Ordinance is an</p> <p>20 offence.</p> <p>21 Under section 42B, if such materials are likely to</p> <p>22 lead to loss of property or lives and if works is</p> <p>23 carried out in this way and if approval is given, to</p> <p>24 that effect, it's also an offence. We have reasons to</p> <p>25 believe that these provisions can apply to temporary</p>

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<p>1 works materials. For instance, the foam board used to 2 cover the windows of the staircase by PC&amp;E.</p> <p>3 But when we look at the communications records, it 4 seems that the positions of government departments are 5 conflicting as far as this is concerned. Statement from 6 the Buildings Department is that using foam boards to 7 extensively cover windows will lead to fire risk and 8 this is against the statutory requirement. This is the 9 position of the Buildings Department.</p> <p>10 And yet the position of the ICU is such that 11 temporary materials such as foam boards are not building 12 works and there is no stringent statutory requirement on 13 the fire-retardancy of such materials. We will talk 14 about foam boards later. We will further consider the 15 position of the ICU on this matter.</p> <p>16 As regards the position of the Fire Services 17 Department, its position is such that their jurisdiction 18 is in the regulation of active fire safety installations 19 such as sprinklers, alarm system and fire hose and reel 20 system. These are systems that will be activated in 21 case of a fire.</p> <p>22 According to the FSD, passive safety message, as in 23 the design of the building, it should be under the ambit 24 of the BD or the ICU.</p> <p>25 The position of all three departments are different,</p>	<p>1 of such materials are not regulated by the current fire 2 safety regulatory regime, then, should new problems 3 arise, which department should be held accountable?</p> <p>4 Experts also point out that in the renovation work 5 of Wang Fuk Court, a large amount of temporary works 6 procedures have been adopted. We have looked at the 7 building materials, the construction materials.</p> <p>8 Gleaning from the information given to us by 9 experts, we learn that each material may have their own 10 features but they are all combustible and play a unique 11 role in the fire. I must emphasise there has been 12 numerous discussions on say, for example, bamboo 13 scaffolding. We are not saying that the material itself 14 is combustible. The Committee should arrive at the only 15 conclusion that the material should be banned. In a lot 16 of renovation works in Hong Kong bamboo scaffolds are 17 used because that is common practice, but it doesn't 18 mean that they all have the same level of risk. Each 19 project is different, with their own special 20 characteristics.</p> <p>21 Apart from the actual situation as well as various 22 factors, there are many other considerations. Say, for 23 example, cost and benefits. They also consider whether 24 the materials can be re-used. Many people have 25 mentioned that, in addition to a bamboo scaffold, can</p>
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<p>1 and this is worrying. If departments have conflicting 2 positions and if no department feel that the matters 3 under their jurisdiction, then how and where can 4 complainants complain? And if the complaints are not 5 addressed, how can they follow up?</p> <p>6 Temporary materials are not subject to any 7 regulation and they do not just include foam board, they 8 can include nylon strips, toe-board and scaffolding 9 nets, et cetera. This morning we saw footage where all 10 these materials were burned and they were crucial to the 11 spread of the fire. Experts will later on give us an 12 analysis of different materials.</p> <p>13 The Development Bureau has its own position. The 14 reply from the Development Bureau is such that the 15 Labour Department and the Buildings Department advised 16 that there are currently no regulations or guidelines. 17 There is no requirement that the walkways and toe-boards 18 must meet any particular standards of fire resistance. 19 The Committee has to consider whether this is 20 a desirable or acceptable situation.</p> <p>21 The temporary materials I mentioned can be found in 22 each and every repair and maintenance project. In 23 large-scale repair and maintenance projects, you can see 24 that such materials are still being used. If government 25 departments such as the ICU are of the view that the use</p>	<p>1 a metal scaffold be used to supplement the project? 2 That is an approach that is adopted in some projects in 3 Hong Kong.</p> <p>4 So in relation to the flammability to materials and 5 the risks they bring, I'm sure the Committee will, based 6 on evidence from experts, conduct further analysis.</p> <p>7 I will now move on to scaffolding nets. Similar to 8 many other buildings under renovation, Wang Fuk Court 9 has been covered by scaffolding nets. In the later part 10 of the hearing, we will hear from experts about the 11 flammability of the nets. The focus we have is the 12 relevant regulations and laws. We will have an overview 13 of the relevant laws and regulations.</p> <p>14 Protective netting of scaffoldings has been subject 15 to regulations and their fire-retardancy is part of the 16 requirements. Relevant departments have laid on you 17 regulations.</p> <p>18 The main ones are, first, in 1995 May, the Buildings 19 Department, BD, published two practice notes. One is in 20 relation to authorised persons and registered structural 21 engineers, PNAP APP-70 and PNRC 26. They expressly 22 stipulate that using plastic material to cover the 23 outside of buildings, the plastic cover itself should be 24 fire-retardant. Efforts must be made to use materials 25 that will not undermine the light and ventilation of the</p>

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<p>1 units.</p> <p>2 The following precautions should be adopted: first,</p> <p>3 to use fire-retardant covering/sheeting; (b), as far as</p> <p>4 possible, refrain from using plastic sheets to cover</p> <p>5 units that are under renovation or units that are</p> <p>6 occupied. These efforts are to minimise obstructions of</p> <p>7 natural ventilation and lighting.</p> <p>8 In a circular letter of the BD, this is issued in</p> <p>9 21 March 2023 after a fire in a building that is</p> <p>10 a number 3 alarm. This is in relation to protective</p> <p>11 netting, screen, tarpaulin, plastic sheeting installed</p> <p>12 to cover the facade of buildings under construction.</p> <p>13 These materials should meet certain level of</p> <p>14 fire-retardancy standards. They should also meet other</p> <p>15 relevant standards as well. Several weeks before the</p> <p>16 fire at Wang Fuk Court, a Chinachem building in Central,</p> <p>17 there was a major fire on the scaffolding.</p> <p>18 On 21 October 2025, about a month before this fire,</p> <p>19 another circular was issued. There were clear</p> <p>20 instructions to all contractors to conduct immediate</p> <p>21 inspections to make sure that all protective net screens</p> <p>22 installed are fire-retardant, to prevent the spread of</p> <p>23 fire. Of course these circulars do not have legal</p> <p>24 binding effect. They are in relation to technical</p> <p>25 guidance. However, breach of these codes and technical</p>	<p>1 tarpaulin as a protective screen, the fire-retardancy</p> <p>2 should meet BS 5867-2:2008, the UK standard, that is</p> <p>3 type B requirements. Or equivalent international</p> <p>4 standards or equivalent standards of other countries.</p> <p>5 That is in relation to the use of tarpaulins.</p> <p>6 This is only in relation to tarpaulin but not other</p> <p>7 protective nets. In 2024, the Labour Department updated</p> <p>8 the code of practice. Code of practice for bamboo</p> <p>9 scaffolding safety. This is in line with the version on</p> <p>10 21 March. In the 5th edition, you see that when it</p> <p>11 comes to protective screens such as nylon nets, plastic</p> <p>12 sheeting, canvas, it should meet relevant standards.</p> <p>13 A UK standard is mentioned.</p> <p>14 The 5th edition was gazetted in April 2024.</p> <p>15 However, it only came into effect on 19 October 2024.</p> <p>16 I would like to point out that in reply to an email</p> <p>17 enquiry dated September 2024 a lady received a reply on</p> <p>18 4 October. It goes words to the effect that, in</p> <p>19 relation to applicable regulations and rules to</p> <p>20 construction sites, there is no applicable fire safety</p> <p>21 standards. The fire risk of protective nets or</p> <p>22 scaffolding nets is relatively low. This is sent from</p> <p>23 a Ms Lam. Her explanation is that as of 24 October</p> <p>24 2024, the 5th edition has yet to come into effect.</p> <p>25 That's why she applied an older version. We find this</p>
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<p>1 guidance may have other impact. Say, for example, in</p> <p>2 a criminal or civil litigations, if these practice</p> <p>3 guidance and guidelines are not complied with, they will</p> <p>4 serve as evidence to show that there is neglect,</p> <p>5 omission of their duties or an active breach of their</p> <p>6 statutory obligations.</p> <p>7 In a circular on 21 October, that is after the fire</p> <p>8 at Chinachem, it is said that if contractors are found</p> <p>9 to breach relevant fire-retardancy requirements, actions</p> <p>10 will be taken against them, as shown here.</p> <p>11 Appropriate actions include suspension of works,</p> <p>12 criminal prosecutions under section 41 of the Buildings</p> <p>13 Ordinance, as well as disciplinary actions. As I said,</p> <p>14 the handling of complaints and supervision is under the</p> <p>15 purview of the ICU, as well as the Buildings Department.</p> <p>16 The BD, the Buildings Department, may initiate criminal</p> <p>17 prosecutions and disciplinary actions as well.</p> <p>18 Now I turn to the Labour Department. When it comes</p> <p>19 to the regulation of scaffolding nets as well as</p> <p>20 protective nets, they have duties as well. The duty of</p> <p>21 the Labour Department is to protect workers as they have</p> <p>22 issued a code of practice for workers working at</p> <p>23 scaffoldings. There is at 4th edition 2017, section</p> <p>24 4.4(d), it says that on scaffoldings there should be</p> <p>25 suitable and fire-retardant protective screens. Using</p>	<p>1 explanation difficult to accept.</p> <p>2 The code of practice in May 2025, the practice notes</p> <p>3 said that these nets should be fire-retardant. The</p> <p>4 logic that in an older version there is no requirement</p> <p>5 for fire-retardancy doesn't stand.</p> <p>6 In a reply dated 4 October 2024, actually by then</p> <p>7 there was a circular issued by the Buildings Department</p> <p>8 in March 2023 stating the relevant fire-retardancy</p> <p>9 standards.</p> <p>10 Ms Lam should be fully aware that when it comes to</p> <p>11 the code of practice, the code of practice for bamboo</p> <p>12 scaffolding safety, it was in force. Even though these</p> <p>13 code of practice do not have legal effect, these codes</p> <p>14 were issued under section 70A. If there are any</p> <p>15 prosecutions initiated, the court may take into</p> <p>16 consideration the non-compliance as evidence.</p> <p>17 So non-compliance of the codes in a way has legal</p> <p>18 effects and implications. If it is found by the Labour</p> <p>19 Department that contractors have breached the codes,</p> <p>20 say, for example, using non-compliant scaffolding nets,</p> <p>21 actions can be taken. Say, for example, written warning</p> <p>22 by labour inspectors or, in serious cases, prosecution.</p> <p>23 The grounds are that they have failed to provide a safe</p> <p>24 working environment.</p> <p>25 At a later stage, we will tell you about the roles</p>

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<p>1 of the Labour Department in relation to scaffolding nets</p> <p>2 as well as the inspections and checks conducted by the</p> <p>3 ICU as well as the BD on the same.</p> <p>4 I'm sure you would like to take a break. This would</p> <p>5 be an appropriate time.</p> <p>6 CHAIRMAN: We will break for 10 minutes.</p> <p>7 (3.13 pm)</p> <p>8 (A short adjournment)</p> <p>9 (3.23 pm)</p> <p>10 CHAIRMAN: Before we resume with the submission, let me</p> <p>11 conduct an estimation on the time. We are yet to</p> <p>12 receive opening submissions from other involved parties.</p> <p>13 Mr Victor Dawes, how much more time do you need?</p> <p>14 MR DAWES: I believe after the day's hearing tomorrow, I can</p> <p>15 complete most of my submission. By next week, in the</p> <p>16 morning, I may need another hour.</p> <p>17 CHAIRMAN: Then what about the submissions from the other</p> <p>18 involved parties? The legal team representing the</p> <p>19 government, the lawyers representing the former</p> <p>20 management committee of the incorporated owners, the</p> <p>21 Urban Renewal Authority, Competition Commission, ISS</p> <p>22 EastPoint and Hop On Management, will you be able to</p> <p>23 complete all your submissions in one day? Will you take</p> <p>24 more than half an hour?</p> <p>25 MR SUEN: On behalf of the government we may need more time,</p>	<p>1 fire-retardancy of the nets must be submitted. If</p> <p>2 possible, on-site fire-retardancy test should be</p> <p>3 conducted on the scaffolding net.</p> <p>4 It shows that at the very -- at very beginning of</p> <p>5 the project, Prestige Construction has been reminded</p> <p>6 that they must follow the fire-retardancy requirements</p> <p>7 under APP-70.</p> <p>8 Now, afterwards, the scaffolding work of blocks F, G</p> <p>9 and H, the works started on 17 June. Prestige engaged</p> <p>10 Gain Profit Shed Industry Ltd as a sub-contractor. The</p> <p>11 contract price was \$3.15 million for each block. Gain</p> <p>12 Profit, on 29 May issued a quotation. Item 3 specifies</p> <p>13 that the scaffolding net will be fire-retardant. The</p> <p>14 first three Chinese characters should be "putting up</p> <p>15 double-layer fire-retardant nets".</p> <p>16 Mr Chan Yu Fai, the main manager of Gain Profit, in</p> <p>17 his evidence, paragraph 6, he admitted that according to</p> <p>18 the contract with Prestige, for the three stages of</p> <p>19 scaffolding work, they must use scaffolding net with</p> <p>20 retardant function.</p> <p>21 Let's move on to the inspection conducted by the ICU</p> <p>22 and the Labour Department. At the beginning, both the</p> <p>23 ICU and the Labour Department have conducted inspection</p> <p>24 on the scaffolding. Of course, it is up to debate</p> <p>25 whether the inspections were sufficient. The first one</p>
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<p>1 but the opening will not exceed one hour. We will try</p> <p>2 to compress the time.</p> <p>3 CHAIRMAN: What about others? Do you plan to make</p> <p>4 a submission of more than half an hour? Then I believe</p> <p>5 we shouldn't arrange for witness testimony on the third</p> <p>6 day. Evidence will begin on the fourth day. We will</p> <p>7 seek to complete all the opening submissions on Monday</p> <p>8 and then next Thursday we will begin hearing evidence</p> <p>9 from the witnesses. That is decided. Please continue.</p> <p>10 MR DAWES: Thank you, Chairman. In the following, I will</p> <p>11 take you to the responsibility of the contractors</p> <p>12 concerning the retardancy of the net, are they aware of</p> <p>13 their responsibility.</p> <p>14 In the initial stage in July 2024, scaffoldings were</p> <p>15 erected for Wang Fuk Court. Before that, retardancy of</p> <p>16 scaffolding nets, the issue has been brought up in two</p> <p>17 separate meetings. The first one was on 30 May 2024.</p> <p>18 That's a management meeting. It was attended by ISS,</p> <p>19 Will Power and Prestige. Now, Prestige mentioned that</p> <p>20 the scaffolding net will be fire-retardant.</p> <p>21 On 17 June 2024, the second construction management</p> <p>22 meeting was held. This is the minutes of the meeting.</p> <p>23 It is very crucial. Paragraph 9, Will Power reminded</p> <p>24 Prestige to comply with the relevant guidelines offered</p> <p>25 by the Building Department and also the certificates of</p>	<p>1 was conducted on 22 July 2024. According to Ms Lam Sau</p> <p>2 Ching from the Labour Department, when the</p> <p>3 representatives of the Labour Department conducted the</p> <p>4 on-site visit, they did require the contractor to</p> <p>5 produce the certificates of fire-retardancy of the net.</p> <p>6 On 24 July, Prestige submitted the certificate</p> <p>7 together with the delivery note. As shown on the</p> <p>8 screen, you can see that the provider, the manufacturer</p> <p>9 of the net is Shandong Chengxu Chemical Fiber Rope Net</p> <p>10 Co. The date of the certificate is dated 8 January</p> <p>11 2024. It shows that the company in Shandong is the</p> <p>12 applicant who is also the supplier of the scaffolding</p> <p>13 net.</p> <p>14 According to some media report, the fire-retardant</p> <p>15 certificate might have been falsified or forged. That</p> <p>16 is because of the name of the testing centre as shown on</p> <p>17 the certificate. Please zoom in.</p> <p>18 You can see that on the certificate, it says</p> <p>19 "National Quality Supervision and Testing Centre for</p> <p>20 Personal Protective Equipment", as shown on the top of</p> <p>21 the certificate. However, the relevant unit has been</p> <p>22 renamed in 2019 to another name. The word "supervision"</p> <p>23 has been changed to "testing". Concerning whether the</p> <p>24 document was forged, there will be further evidence to</p> <p>25 that later.</p>

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<p>1 The inspection on the retardancy of scaffolding nets                  2 by the Labour Department was only limited to                  3 verification of the documents. There was no on-site                  4 tests conducted. According to the Labour Department's                  5 witnesses, they lacked professional knowledge on testing                  6 the fire-retardancy of the net. According to their                  7 understanding, the responsibility lies with the                  8 Buildings Department.                  9 Let's move to the inspection work of the Independent                  10 Checking Unit.                  11 Whether the scaffolding net was in compliance with                  12 the Buildings Department's Ordinance was under the remit                  13 of the ICU rather than the Buildings Department. On                  14 28 October 2024, the ICU conducted an investigation. On                  15 that day, it conducted tests on the scaffolding net on                  16 the rooftop and the ground floor of Wang Fuk Court. It                  17 includes -- the inspection conducted by Mr Andy Ku and                  18 Ms Amanda Lau Ka Man from the BD and also Mr Li Ka Ho.                  19 That is recorded in Mr Wu's witness statement.                  20 The ICU has also provided a relevant video                  21 recording. We are now going to play a video showing the                  22 inspection work on the rooftop.                  23 (Video played)                  24 VIDEO RECORDING: Let's try the other side as well. I'm now                  25 going to ignite it. If I continue applying heat to it,</p>	<p>1 witness statement of Mr Ku in note 5 he says the quick                  2 test conducted on scaffolding net, there is no standard                  3 available for that. If that's the case, we believe that                  4 it is something that we have to rectify.                  5 Also, during the ICU's investigation, they -- if                  6 they followed the fire-retardancy standard as shown on                  7 the certificate, we believe that the test would have                  8 failed the standards. On that day, Prestige sent                  9 a message to the ICU via WhatsApp. They've also                  10 provided ICU with the same retardancy certificate we                  11 have seen.                  12 Now, on page 3, item 10, concerning the                  13 fire-retardant duration, it shows zero. I mean                  14 continuous burning, it shows zero seconds. That means                  15 after removing the source of heat, how long will the net                  16 continue to burn.                  17 Now, the requirement is that the time of continuous                  18 burning should be less than four seconds. As shown by                  19 the video just now, the duration of continuous burning,                  20 whether the fire was extinguished deliberately, was at                  21 least 10 seconds. So the time for continuous burning                  22 should be longer than 10 seconds and that is not in line                  23 with the declaration on the form.                  24 Then the ICU submitted a report to the Buildings                  25 Department. On 29 October Mr Andy Ku sent an email to</p>
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<p>1 it will light up.                  2 MR DAWES: Let's look at the first part of the video again.                  3 Please pay attention to the time and also why the fire                  4 was extinguished during the first try.                  5 (Video played)                  6 According to their observation, when the net was                  7 being burned by the lighter for 15 seconds, it caught                  8 fire and then continued to burn for 10 seconds until                  9 someone blew out the fire.                  10 After the test, it seemed that the ICU personnel                  11 thought that the net was fire-retardant. Mr Gui Shiu                  12 Ping in paragraph 48, in the witness testimony, he said                  13 that:                  14 "Subsequently, the contractor cut a piece of net                  15 from the rooftop and conducted a test in a less windy                  16 location. It caught fire after about 10 seconds. The                  17 contractor then proceeded to retest the same piece of                  18 net twice to demonstrate the fire-retardancy. The RI's                  19 assigned person did not raise any concern with this                  20 test."                  21 Now, we will later explore why the fire was                  22 extinguished and whether that is an issue. It seems                  23 that the ICU was not surprised at the result of the                  24 first test and the failure in the first test did not                  25 raise the alarm. It's worth noting that in the first</p>	<p>1 the effect of the findings of the test that the                  2 contractor has provided the ICU with a report that the                  3 requirements of the APP-70 have been fulfilled.                  4 The relevant inspector, the RI, has conducted an                  5 on-site test and sampling test. According to the test,                  6 there's no evidence to suggest that the protective nets                  7 do not meet the flame retardant requirements. There is                  8 nothing in this email to mention the point of concern we                  9 pointed out just now and there was no mention of whether                  10 the net should continue to burn for another 10 seconds                  11 and should there be someone to put out the fire. Even                  12 if we adopted the 10-second standard, the test was not                  13 compliant with that standard. Of course the test will                  14 be further explained by Mr Ku to the Committee.                  15 As the regards and the response and follow-up by                  16 ICU, we will have some questions afterwards.                  17 Another point of concern is the way the contractor                  18 handled the footage, was there anything hidden, any                  19 concealment, because according to the former OC, ISS,                  20 they watched the same recording of the test. So the                  21 content was the same, so we believe the footage was                  22 supplied by PC&amp;E to the OC and also ISS. We will play                  23 it once again and you can see the difference.                  24 (Video played)                  25 VIDEO RECORDING: Can you see it? I followed the net.</p>

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<p>1 MR DAWES: There is nothing wrong with the right-hand side  2 of the footage; rather, the recording has skipped part  3 of the footage in our ICU. In other words, the footage  4 was not complete. Since the content received was the  5 same, we have reasons to believe that it was provided by  6 Prestige to ISS and a former OI. Whether there was any  7 concealment, we will explore that in further evidential  8 hearing.  9 Lastly, I'd like to say that on 18 November, ICU did  10 an inspection. The cause of the inspection was because  11 on 11 November there was a memo sent from the  12 Commissioner for Labour.  13 And the memo reads:  14 "The Commissioner has received complaints and  15 enquiries with regard to Wang Fuk Court and the  16 following concerns were raised, whether the bamboo or  17 the scaffold nets are in compliance with city standards.  18 In view of the above public safety issues, the case  19 is referred to you for any actions you may deem  20 necessary."  21 ICU responded later. The same team, ie Mr Ku,  22 Ms Lau and also Mr Li, did an inspection on 18 November.  23 They did it themselves. They did not pass  24 responsibility to the Labour Department. Now, you can  25 see that they do have the sense that they should be</p>	<p>1 the Committee and that's the reply and it's now shown on  2 the screen.  3 When a client orders scaffolding nets, it will  4 specify the dimension and also the quality. On  5 23 October 2025, Gain Profit order placement for  6 delivery to Wang Fuk Court and in the order the client  7 specified that no fire-retardancy requirement. And then  8 they did not ask for any scaffolding nets that has to be  9 fire-retardant. That's the request of the client.  10 Now, for fire-retardant safety nets, they cost \$100  11 a sheet and for those that are non-fire-retardant, \$54.  12 So there's a difference of RMB30 per sheet. And  13 fire-retardant scaffolding net can stop the spread of  14 fire and the fire will be put out in a few seconds.  15 Non-fire-retardant safety nets will continue burning  16 until the whole net is burnt.  17 To put it simply, Lam Kee said that Gain Profit Shed  18 Industry Ltd purchased scaffolding nets that are cheaper  19 and that were not fire-retardant. Gain Profit also was  20 subject to our investigation. Mr Lam provided  21 a statement.  22 In paragraph 14 it is said that:  23 "In July 2025, after the first typhoon signal number  24 10 was hoisted, Gordon called me. Hopefully I could  25 find someone to mend the safety nets at Wang Fuk Court,</p>
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<p>1 responsible for the scaffolding nets, and during the  2 inspection, the ICU required the contractor to provide  3 12 pieces of bamboo scaffolding nets from blocks C, D,  4 E, F, G for test, and their conclusion was there was no  5 particular problem. Mr Ku's evidence showed that the  6 test of all six blocks were either conducted on the  7 lower floors or on the roof of the buildings. ICU of  8 course chose locations where tests could be done more  9 easily.  10 If the contractor was allowed to choose samples for  11 the IC to test, would that have any impact on the  12 outcome of the test? The kind of scaffolding nets to be  13 installed at different locations may be subject to  14 manipulation by the contractor, so this should also be  15 a concern for us.  16 Next, I will show you other loopholes and relevant  17 evidence. As we all know, after the typhoon -- you may  18 recall that last year we had two large typhoons.  19 Evidence showed that on 22 and 24 July, 16 August and  20 3 September last year, it purchased some scaffolding  21 nets from Gain Profit Shed. According to Lam Kee, Gain  22 Profit Shed placed order for scaffolding nets without  23 any non-fire-retardancy requirements. Lam Kee would  24 supply scaffolding nets according to the order of the  25 buyer. And Lam Kee answered some type of questions by</p>	<p>1 and so I delivered 100-odd sheets from the store of Gain  2 Profit to Wang Fuk Court, but then the damage was  3 substantial and 100 sheets was not sufficient. Gordon  4 asked how come the damage was so serious, and  5 I explained that the scaffolding was first erected in  6 July 2024 and it's been a year, up to July 2025. After  7 wear and tear of one year, fire-retardant nets will be  8 subject to wear and tear more easily. So this is bound  9 to happen after a typhoon.  10 And Gordon said in December 2025 the first phase of  11 Wang Fuk Court could have been completed and the  12 scaffolding can be dismantled. There were only five  13 months in between, so ordinary nets will do, and I was  14 asked to buy ordinary nets for Wang Fuk Court. But then  15 I explained to Gordon that Wang Fuk Court project  16 required fire-resistant nets and ordinary nets would not  17 be appropriate. Then the answer I got was I should do  18 as told, and if I purchased fire-retardant nets, they  19 would not foot the bill.  20 After leaving Wang Fuk Court, I felt there was some  21 problem with Gordon's approach and so I called Mr Hau to  22 repeat Mr Gordon's request, but then I was told to do as  23 told; so I ordered 450 ordinary nets for delivery to  24 Wang Fuk Court and then I will bill Gain Profit for the  25 nets."</p>

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<p>1 At this stage, we cannot confirm whether it was the 2 decision of Mr Chan Yu Fai or Mr Ho Kin Yip on behalf of 3 Gain Profit. Of course the tribunal will have further 4 evidence on this subject. 5 On 20 July 2025 there was Typhoon Wipha and typhoon 6 signal number 10 was hoisted. The original scaffolding 7 nets were damaged, and as said by Mr Chan Yu Fai, the 8 reason for not ordering fire-retardant net was for 9 cost-saving purpose. 10 And then, in September, there was another major 11 typhoon on 24 September. Once again, the scaffolding 12 nets of Wang Fuk Court were changed, and again nets that 13 were non-fire-retardant were purchased. On 14 25 September, the next day after the typhoon, Gain 15 Profit approached Binzhou Inspection and Testing Centre 16 and purchased new scaffolding nets. 17 This is the messages on the mobile phone of Mr Chan 18 Yu Fai. This is the WeChat communications between Gain 19 Profit Shed and Chun Yuen. Please pay attention. 20 AUDIO RECORDING: Please do it as soon as possible. Yes, 21 please, double quick. 22 MR DAWES: You can note from the messages that the material 23 purchased was green non-fire-retardant at RMB24 per 24 metre. And on the 25th, 26th and 30th, another purchase 25 was made and, according to Lam Kee, all the scaffolding</p>	<p>1 highlighted in purple. 2 The paragraph in purple was not highlighted by us to 3 draw your attention to it. It was in purple when the 4 evidence was obtained. So someone highlighted it purple 5 beforehand. 6 Then at 12.31 pm, someone captured PNAP APP-23 from 7 the computer of PC&amp;E. 8 Protective screen consists of two layers, and this 9 is about the fire-retardant requirements of the nets. 10 So someone used purple to highlight this paragraph. 11 This goes to show that someone did give consideration to 12 this paragraph. 13 Then at 12.37, just a few minutes afterwards, 14 Prestige computer, a circular issued by the BD dated 15 23 March 2023 was captured. It also said that the 16 scaffolding nets should comply with GB 5725-2009. You 17 can see that at the near bottom part of the page. 18 PC&amp;E gave us a certificate dated 8 January 2024 19 stating that the certificate can prove the 20 fire-retardancy of the nets. From whichever angle you 21 look at it, the certificate itself was outdated. Why 22 was there an outdated certificate? Because, as we all 23 know, the nets ordered were not really fire-retardant. 24 The same day, 2 October, Labour Department staff 25 went to Wang Fuk Court for investigation. The</p>
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<p>1 nets ordered were not fire-retardant. Mr Chan Yu Fai 2 was very frank in giving evidence. In paragraph 16 of 3 his statement, he admitted that he did as instructed by 4 ordering 4,500 sheets of non-fire-retardant scaffolding 5 nets. This evidence is very clear. 6 Evidence about scaffolding nets do not just include 7 what we have submitted. 8 Then on 27 September 2025, in meeting, that is after 9 Ragasa attacked Hong Kong, the OI enquired whether the 10 scaffolding nets should be replaced and then Will Power 11 was required to provide a written statement to see 12 whether the nets should continue to be used. According 13 to minutes of meeting, Mr Kong Cheung Fat, a member of 14 the IO, in that working meeting enquired with Will Power 15 whether Will Power had verified the certification of the 16 scaffolding nets. The memory or the recollection is 17 there was no response from Will Power at that meeting. 18 And then the police seized computers of Will Power at 19 the temporary office of Wang Fuk Court. 20 In responding to enquiries from owners, the 21 following was found. At 11.45 on 2 October 2021 there 22 was capture, screen capture of this, signed by the China 23 National Accreditation Service for Conformity, or rather 24 the National Quality Supervision and Testing Centre for 25 Personal Protective Equipment. That is GB 5720,</p>	<p>1 contractor was reminded to take care of safety issues 2 relating to the scaffolding. You can look at 3 paragraph 2. 4 On the same day, Lam Kee delivered another batch of 5 nets that are not fire-retardant. And about 10 days 6 later, on 13 October, Gain Profit, Mr Chan Yu Fai, used 7 WeChat to contact Chun Yuen. We will play the messages 8 again and you can hear the enquiry. 9 VIDEO RECORDING: I would like to know if we want to change 10 the design of the nets, do you have the plan or the 11 drawing for us? 12 MR DAWES: From what we heard, and we can see here, Mr Chan 13 asked whether Chun Yuen can provide fire-retardant 14 coating that can be sprayed on to the net. According to 15 Chun Yuen, that cannot be done once the net is 16 manufactured. That's 13 October. 17 Then on 25 October at another working meeting, 18 Prestige reported that for the damaged nets, with the 19 exception of the bigger ones, they've all been repaired. 20 Of course there was nothing in this report about their 21 ordering nets that are not fire-retardant. 22 Two days later, 27 October, staff member of Prestige 23 sent out the following WhatsApp messages. The messages 24 are stored in the mobile phones of Hau Wa Kin after he 25 has been arrested by the police, he received from</p>

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<p>1 a Sam Tam and this is the content:                  2 "Tomorrow afternoon expect ICU to visit the site.                  3 Expect that the net will be burned. Please check in                  4 advance which ones are all right."                  5 You notice from the list of messages there is                  6 a bracket stating that it should not be made public or                  7 disclosed. How come that Prestige would know that the                  8 ICU would conduct an inspection the following day?                  9 On 27th at 9.54 am, we later learned that on the                  10 same day at about 8.50 am, Ms Lau Ka Man of ICU through                  11 WhatsApp sent a message to Mr Yeung from Will Power                  12 stating that there will be inspections conducted at the                  13 site on the 28th in the afternoon. This is what it                  14 says:                  15 "Good morning, I remember Andy will start his leave                  16 from 3 November. Andy would like to inspect the                  17 scaffolding net in view of the enquiries received from                  18 residents. The main concern is that the old ones are                  19 fragile and may fail to protect. Understand. Target is                  20 tomorrow for a visit at Wang Fuk. Afternoon's fine. In                  21 the morning there will be inspection. Tomorrow                  22 afternoon we're fine. Please ask Prestige to be                  23 present. We would like to understand the                  24 fire-retardancy of the old and new nets."                  25 CHAIRMAN: From whom?</p>	<p>1 messages asking to buy 115 pieces of fire-retardant net,                  2 he said that it was an urgent order for fire-retardant                  3 net to replace existing ones; that is, the skirt of                  4 existing scaffolding net of Prestige. He said that                  5 Prestige made such a request because of an inspection of                  6 the Labour Department.                  7 If that holds true, it causes serious concern. You                  8 can see that there are certain conducts pursuant to an                  9 inspection and, whether there is any breaches, we will                  10 arrive at a conclusion.                  11 On 27 October, we are aware that a purchase order                  12 was made by Prestige. We understand that this is the                  13 only purchase for fire-retardant net placed by                  14 Gain Profit Shed. The order is for \$100. Before the                  15 inspection, that batch was sent to Wang Fuk Court.                  16 Mr Ku of ICU in his statement stated that there was                  17 a simple test conducted with Ms Li. A lighter was used                  18 to test the nets, including ones that have yet to be                  19 unpacked, as well as existing ones from certain                  20 locations, including the ground floor as well as the                  21 rooftop. They found that the test turned out to be all                  22 right. You know why.                  23 Our preliminary findings are that there are systemic                  24 problems in relation to inspections and tests. If the                  25 contractor was fully alert as to when and what will be</p>
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<p>1 MR DAWES: From ICU, Ms Lau Ka Man, to Mr Yeung Chi Man from                  2 Will Power.                  3 In the same day on the morning at 10.10, you can see                  4 it says -- it stated very clearly the purpose of the                  5 visit. It's been made clear to Will Power.                  6 Next piece of evidence. On 28 October, in the                  7 inspection -- that is in response to the series of                  8 complaints lodged by Mr Kong Cheung Fat from                  9 29 September 2025. In one of the complaints it                  10 mentioned about a recent scaffolding fire in Central.                  11 The fire started and spread rapidly. He expressed                  12 concerns about the safety hazards posed to residents.                  13 He's made it very clear.                  14 The purpose of the inspection is to see if there is                  15 any non-compliance pursuant to an enquiry made by                  16 residents. The practice of the government is that prior                  17 to inspections there would not be any advance notice or                  18 very little advance notice. However, on this occasion,                  19 you see that there has been arrangement made and the                  20 purpose of the inspection was also expressly conveyed.                  21 So it fails to serve the purpose.                  22 You see evidence showing that the ICU was misled in                  23 relation to fire-retardancy.                  24 Let's go to October 2025. The evidence of Mr Chan                  25 Yu Fai shows on 27 October, upon receipt of WhatsApp</p>	<p>1 inspected and there was time for them to buy new nets                  2 for the inspection, we can clearly see where the problem                  3 lies. We believe that this is not a one-off problem.                  4 We have received WhatsApp messages, WhatsApp records                  5 from the police. There is evidence showing that the day                  6 before the inspection ICU informed Will Power about the                  7 inspection. Advance notice given by ICU is a worrying                  8 practice.                  9 You've also seen instances of prior notice to                  10 inspections. The representative of ICU will be the one                  11 we've mentioned, Amanda Lau, Lau Ka Man.                  12 On 8 November 2025, Wang Fuk Court conducted another                  13 progress meeting. Those who attended are ISS, Will                  14 Power, Prestige and ICU. And it is mentioned that ICU                  15 conducted an inspection the week before and the test                  16 result showed that the net met fire-retardant                  17 requirements. Obviously, residents have been misled.                  18 The nets that didn't meet fire-retardancy were there                  19 and this practice has continued. During an inspection                  20 by the Labour Department on 20 November, it was said                  21 that the Labour Department became aware that there were                  22 some replacement of nets after the typhoon. At a later                  23 time on that day, what Prestige did was to obtain the                  24 retardancy report dated 8 November 2024 from the                  25 National Quality Supervision and Testing Centre for</p>

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<p>1 Personal Protective Equipment. This certificate no 2 longer apply. It covered only old nets. But most of 3 the nets were newly purchased ones and they are not 4 fire-retardant.</p> <p>5 What is equally concerning is that, from computers 6 seized from the temporary office of Prestige, the police 7 found another file. The file claims to be a 8 fire-retardant certificate of another piece of net. 9 This is different from the ones we've seen before. 10 There is one area/unit to be tested. Top left, there is 11 no information, the parties to be tested. We have 12 doubts about the authenticity of this document.</p> <p>13 No matter how you put it, this new certificate is 14 pursuant to doubts expressed when they were shown -- 15 when the Labour Department was shown a certificate dated 16 8 January 2024. The Labour Department did not raise any 17 doubts. Ms Lam gave an explanation. In her statement, 18 she said -- I'll read it out:</p> <p>19 "When we received the test report, we were concerned 20 with the result. We were not aware that the report 21 received was the same one received by the Labour 22 Department on 24 July."</p> <p>23 I'll read out the English:</p> <p>24 "When the test report was received, we focused on 25 the test result but did not notice at the material time</p>	<p>1 nets. In addition, we observed that ICU and the Labour 2 Department did not find out that non-fire-retardant nets 3 were used. There are concerns.</p> <p>4 First, the rapid test conducted -- the ICU's stance 5 is that there are no established regulations and rules. 6 In the first test, the net was burned for 10 seconds. 7 Obviously, it failed the test. However, the ICU did not 8 express any concern as to this fact. Thirdly, the ICU 9 gave a prior notice to contractors about an inspection. 10 They've also chosen convenient locations to conduct the 11 inspection. This gives Prestige a chance to do what 12 they're supposed to do.</p> <p>13 In relation to the replacement of nets, the 14 contractor provided an old fire-retardant certification. 15 It was not noticed by the government department.</p> <p>16 This afternoon we have looked into systemic problems 17 as well as human factors. Of course, the Committee, 18 having heard the evidence, will have their own findings. 19 In any event, we have shown you evidence that there are 20 problems with scaffolding nets.</p> <p>21 I notice that it's a 4.15. I'm going to move on to 22 foam boards, which is quite lengthy. Given our 23 progress, I suggest that we continue tomorrow.</p> <p>24 CHAIRMAN: We will finish early. The hearing will continue 25 at 10.00 am.</p>
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<p>1 that the report received was the same time as the one LD 2 received on 24 July 2024."</p> <p>3 As the Labour Department conducted proper 4 verification of the fire-retardancy report, I believe 5 witnesses from the Labour Department will proffer an 6 explanation to the Committee.</p> <p>7 There is also evidence showing that the person in 8 charge of Gain Profit Shed, upon knowing about the fire 9 of Wang Fuk Court, gave a response. Let's play 10 a recording from the wife of Mr Chan Yu Fai, Ms Chung. 11 It's an audio recording. Ms Chung is a shareholder and 12 director of Gain Profit Shed. The clip is playing now.</p> <p>13 (Audio played)</p> <p>14 AUDIO RECORDING: There is a fire at Wang Fuk Court. Make 15 calls. Sort it out. I tried to call you. You did not 16 answer the call. We send nets over but I was asked to 17 explain because those nets are not fire-retardant.</p> <p>18 MR DAWES: The Committee is showing you just -- we're only 19 showing you part of the evidence we have received 20 because of time constraints. From the problems outlined 21 this afternoon, we can see that, first, the damaged nets 22 have been replaced with cheaper non-fire-retardant nets. 23 Someone deliberately concealed this fact. They have 24 also actively given misrepresentations to the government 25 departments, claiming that they have used fire-retardant</p>	<p>1 (4.17 pm) 2 (The hearing adjourned until 10.00 am the following day) 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25</p>

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