

Signboard control in the Central and Western District

Written reply by the Buildings Department (BD):

- 1 Up to end of February 2018, 5 unauthorised signboards in Central & Western District have been validated under the Signboard Validation Scheme (“SBVS”). The BD does not compile statistics on the existing number of unauthorised signboards in Central & Western District.
- 2 In Central & Western District, up to end of February 2018, BD has successfully obtained 1 priority demolition orders (“PDO”) from the District Court and 2 mega-sized signboards involved were removed. BD will continue to identify suitable signboards for the application for PDO in Central & Western District. Over the past 3 years, there were 288 unauthorised signboards removed or validated under SBVS in the District. Moreover, 389 dangerous or abandoned signboards were removed / repaired.
- 3 BD is very concerned on the safety problem of signboard. A risk-based approach taking into account the available resources is adopted in regulating the existing signboards under the Signboard Control System (“SBCS”). BD has been taking appropriate enforcement action to deal with the unauthorised signboards. According to the current enforcement policy against unauthorised / dangerous / abandoned signboards, BD has implemented the following:-
 - (i) BD will take immediate enforcement action on unauthorised signboards that are new or are in progress, and at the same time, launch large scale clearance operations to remove existing unauthorised signboards.
 - (ii) For dangerous or abandoned signboards, BD will, according to Section 105(1) of the Public Health and Municipal Ordinance, serve Dangerous Sign Removal Notice to the signboard owner requiring the removal of the signboards. During emergency situation, BD will take prompt action to remove dangerous signboards and then recover the cost from the signboard owners.
 - (iii) For existing unauthorised signboards which are relatively small in scale and pose less potential risk, BD has implemented the SBVS since 2 September 2013. Under the scheme, the existing signboards may be retained for continued use after inspection, strengthening (if required) and certification of their structural safety by the prescribed building professionals and/or prescribed registered contractors. The validation is valid for 5 years after which the signboard owner should either make a fresh validation submission or remove the signboard. Where the signboard has become dangerous during the validity period due to lack of proper maintenance, BD may take prompt enforcement action and require the signboard owner to remove the signboard.

In 2018, the work targets for number of removal orders issued in respect of unauthorised signboards and number of unauthorised signboards removed/validated have been increased as below:

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of removal orders issued in respect of unauthorised signboards	600	600	750	800
Number of unauthorised signboards removed/validated	800	900	950	1,050

- 4 BD adopts a pragmatic approach under the SBCS to resolve the problem of building safety associated with unauthorised signboards. The Government is obliged to undertake prompt enforcement actions to safeguard public safety. Nevertheless, the situation of unauthorised signboards cannot be tackled within a short period of time in view of the large number of unauthorised signboards and the resources available for enforcement actions. Also, many of the existing unauthorised signboards are in active use in business operations and their existence carries notable value for sustaining local commercial activities and contributing to Hong Kong's prosperity. The prevailing SBCS strikes a balance between the need to tackle the building safety problem arising from existing unauthorised signboards and to avoid bringing undue inconvenience to business operators.
- 5 Besides, most of the signboards pose no potential danger. BD adopts a risk-based approach to regulate the existing signboards. While BD takes enforcement actions against those signboards posed with potential danger, on the other hand, more signboards will be regulated under the Minor Works Control System and the SBVS. This would help achieving the goal of enhancing safety of signboards in the long run.

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Secretariat of the Central and Western District Council
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