

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Promotion of Green Burial and Design Thinking

Purpose

This paper aims to brief Members on the efforts made by the Government to promote green burial and the initiative of adopting “Design Thinking” to enhance public awareness and participation.

Current Landscape

2. Green burial has become more popular in recent years. In 2020, the number of green burial cases in Hong Kong (including the scattering of ashes in Gardens of Remembrance (GoRs) or at sea) reached 7 676, representing an increase of over 1 100 cases (or around 17%) as compared with the figure in 2017. The relevant figures in the past eight years are provided at Annex.

Enhancements of Green Burial Facilities and Services

(a) Scattering of ashes in Garden of Remembrance (GoRs)

3. At present, members of the public may scatter ashes of the deceased in GoRs set up in the nine columbaria of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD). These columbaria are located at Cape Collinson, Diamond Hill, Wo Hop Shek, Fu Shan, Kwai Chung, Cheung Chau, Peng Chau, Lamma Island and Tsang Tsui.

4. Among them, the most-recently built GoR in the Tsang Tsui Columbarium in Tuen Mun was opened in March 2021. The facility faces the sea and blends in with the surrounding natural environment. Apart from the lawn, there are areas covered by featured pebble stones in the GoR for the public to choose to scatter ashes of the deceased. To allow the public to know more about the facilities in the GoR, FEHD has

arranged free guided tours. Members of the public may register for visits to the GoR guided by dedicated staff.

(b) Scattering of ashes at sea

5. Members of the public may also apply for scattering ashes at three designated locations¹ using the free ferry service provided by FEHD or privately arranged boats. At present, free ferry service is provided every Saturday. In addition, FEHD also arranges memorial sailings during the grave-sweeping seasons to assist the public in paying tribute to the deceased at the waters where ashes were scattered. Since 2020, the number of memorial sailings have increased from four to eight each year (including four during the Ching Ming Festival and four during the Chung Yeung Festival).

(c) Mobile application and thematic website

6. In June 2010, FEHD launched the Internet Memorial Service (IMS) which provides a free memorial website (www.memorial.gov.hk) for users to create memorial webpages for their deceased loved ones and family members and to pay tribute to them at any time and from anywhere. As at September 2021, the IMS has accumulated over 21 000 users, about 20 600 memorial pages and over 5.98 million accumulated hit counts. During the COVID-19 epidemic, IMS assists the public in paying tribute to the deceased from home. In 2020, IMS recorded about 616 500 hits, representing an increase of 38% over the figure of about 445 500 in 2019. In June 2018, a mobile application of the IMS was launched. Its functions include personalised profile settings, message notifications and social media sharing. It is easier for the public to pay tribute to their deceased family members and friends with their mobile devices. As at September 2021, the mobile application of IMS was downloaded about 15 000 times.

7. In March 2018, FEHD launched a thematic website “Green Burial” (www.greenburial.gov.hk). With a clear and simple webpage design, relevant information was provided under three main themes, namely scattering of cremains in GoRs, scattering of cremains at sea and the IMS. Information on application procedures, locations of GoRs, designated areas for scattering of ashes at sea and free ferry services, as well as promotional materials, etc. have been uploaded to the website for public browsing.

¹ The three designated locations are at the east of Tap Mun, east of Tung Lung Chau and south of West Lamma Channel.

(d) Central register

8. The Government launched a central register in January 2019 to enable the public to register their wish for green burial free of charge so that they can plan in advance their after-death arrangements and make it known to their families². Application can be submitted online, by post, by fax or by email. If a deceased person who has registered his/her wish for green burial is identified by the computer system upon cremation booking by his/her family members, FEHD will take the initiative to contact the bereaved family and provide appropriate assistance. As at September 2021, more than 7 200 members of the public have registered their wish for green burial³.

Upcoming Strategy and Initiatives

9. We believe that the promotion of green burial should continue to be forged ahead along the following strategic directions –

(a) Service enhancements

The Government will continue to construct more GoRs, including the ones located in the Shek Mun Columbarium in Sha Tin and the Siu Ho Wan Columbarium, which are scheduled for completion in 2024 and 2026 respectively. The design of the GoR in the Shek Mun Columbarium adopts the concept of “returning to nature”. Different species of flower and tree will be planted to form a natural landscape contour, thereby offering peaceful ambience for visitors in remembrance of their family members and friends.

In addition, to further promote green burial, FEHD has installed electronic kiosks for digital worshipping at the GoRs in Diamond Hill and Cape Collison. Similar facilities will be installed at the GoR in Shek Mun, Sha Tin for public use.

We also encourage non-governmental and religious organisations to build GoRs at suitable sites. Green burial facilities have been installed in the Junk Bay Chinese Permanent Cemetery and the Pokfulam Chinese Christian Cemetery. A GoR is also being

² Even if there is no prior registration, descendants can still choose green burial for the deceased.

³ FEHD contacted the descendants of 255 deceased persons who had registered their wish for green burial. Of these deceased persons, 162 (around 64%) eventually had green burial with their ashes handled in the way they had wished.

constructed in the Hong Kong Buddhist Cemetery in Cape Collinson and is scheduled for completion and commissioning by the end of 2021.

(b) Public education and publicity

On this front, FEHD actively promotes green burial as a more environmentally friendly and sustainable means of handling ashes of the deceased. It highlights that in scattering cremated ashes at sea, the deceased may return to the sea and be reunited with nature freely; and in scattering ashes in GoRs, the return to nature may nourish other lives and the bereaved can also find solace knowing that their loved ones live on in another form. To gain a better understanding of the public views on green burial, two questionnaire surveys were conducted by FEHD in 2020. In one of the surveys, users of cremation service in the past few years were asked how they handled the cremated ashes of the deceased; in the other survey, public views were sought on green burial. According to the findings, the main reason for the respondents to choose green burial was to respect the wishes of the deceased. Another important reason was that green burial features rituals in a simpler form and is more environmentally friendly. Meanwhile, respondents commonly recommended greater efforts in public education and publicity to enhance public acceptance of green burial. In this connection, FEHD will continue to increase publicity through various channels including broadcasting Announcement in the Public Interest on television, radio and online platforms, producing promotional videos, displaying posters and banners, launching mobile application and dedicated website, conducting exhibitions and talks⁴ at tertiary institutions and secondary schools, setting up promotional booths and distributing leaflets at public housing estates, public markets and public parks with a view to disseminating green burial messages, and running promotional activities at exhibitions for the seniors, etc. so as to gain public acceptance of green burial as a sustainable form of ash disposal. Banners promoting green burial services will continue to be displayed at conspicuous locations in various government venues and public places.

As a standing arrangement, the Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre of FEHD located in the Kowloon Park in Tsim Sha Tsui provides an exhibition area with multi-media display equipment

⁴ Depending on the actual situation of the Covid-19 epidemic, some physical talks may be held online instead.

for promotion of green burial. In 2020, its green burial exhibition area was updated by adding an introduction to the central register of green burial.

(c) *Community engagement*

(i) Ongoing activities

FEHD has strengthened the promotion of green burial as part of its regular work in recent years. At present, a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are assisting with the promotion of green burial when providing advisory and information services to the elderly on after-death arrangements. Apart from holding talks on green burial services and facilities, FEHD also makes arrangements for these NGOs and other elderly centres/homes to visit the GoRs managed by FEHD and to see the ashes scattering service at sea. To tally with anti-epidemic measures during the Covid-19 period, FEHD suspended physical talks and visits, but held some talks online instead, together with the broadcast of promotional videos on GoRs.

FEHD has been distributing leaflets and booklets on green burial to the after-death service units of relevant government departments/NGOs, day care elderly centres, homes for the elderly, religious organisations, tertiary institutions, secondary schools and integrated children and youth services centres, etc. FEHD has also established contact with some 40 hospitals for distribution of booklets/leaflets on green burial to the public. Hyperlinks to FEHD's thematic webpage of green burial have been set up under the websites of some government departments and NGOs.

As mentioned in paragraph 4 above, to enhance public awareness of green burial, FEHD launched guided tours to the Tsang Tsui GoR on a trial basis. Dedicated staff will lead members of the public to visit the garden free of charge and explain to them the relevant services and facilities. Such free guided tours will be extended to other GoRs gradually.

(ii) Thematic promotion

To enhance students' awareness of green burial, thereby encouraging them to promote green burial among family and friends, FEHD held the Green Burial Writing Competition for all secondary school

students in Hong Kong in October 2020. After assessment, the panel of judges selected the winning articles, which have been uploaded to FEHD's thematic website of green burial.

Regarding collaboration with NGOs, FEHD recently co-organised with RunOurCity and other organisations the “Yulan Virtual Run”(盞蘭虛擬跑), which featured the theme of green burial for exploring the question of life and death in a light and relaxed way of running. Participants were required to plan their own running routes and visit FEHD's GoRs. The activity enabled the public to learn more about green burial services and facilities.

FEHD will continue to explore new ideas to foster collaboration with different stakeholders with a view to organising more activities which could enhance community acceptance of green burial as a more sustainable form of ash disposal.

Application of “Design Thinking” in Promotion of Green Burial

10. “Design thinking” is a user-based problem-solving approach. Centred on the needs of service users, it seeks innovative and appropriate solutions to various issues and creates more possibilities and room for sustainable development. With a view to enhancing effectiveness and sustainability of promotion of green burial, FEHD plans to commission a consultancy firm using “Design Thinking” approach to develop and recommend strategies to raise public awareness and enhance user-acceptance, and to provide better user experience on green burial services. The proposed strategies and measures would make green burial a well-received message to the public, motivate the public to familiarise and take part in Green Burial Central Register (GBCR) registration, inspire behavioural change of public mindset to adopt green burial as an environmentally-friendly after-death arrangements, etc.

11. “Design thinking” workshops would be organised to collect the views and innovative ideas for engagement of public and various stakeholders, including users/potential users of green burial services of different age groups, life education / after-death service unit of relevant NGOs/social enterprises, service groups such as the elderly, undertakers, in-house operation staff, etc., thereby further improving green burial services and encouraging more people to adopt green burial.

12. Through the adoption of “design thinking” approach, user experience and motivation of stakeholders will be examined under interviews by the consultant; the problems would be defined by analysing the observations; innovative ideas would be generated from the process. Upon gathering and deliberating the views/ ideas and prototype of the consultancy study, we will review the current strategies and initiatives for promotion of green burial through various channels, and aim to provide more user-oriented service so as to gain public acceptance towards green burial which hopefully will steadily become the mainstream method of handling cremated ashes.

13. FEHD is in the process of preparing the tender document for selection and appointment of the consultancy firm. The project is expected to commence in the first quarter of 2022.

Advice sought

14. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and offer comments on the promotion of green burial.

**Food and Health Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
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Number of Green Burial Cases between 2014 and 2021

| Year | Scattering of ashes in GoRs | | Scatter- ing of ashes at sea (C) | Number of green burial cases (A)+(B) +(C) | Percentage of total number of deaths |
|---------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| | Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (A) | Private cemeteries [*] (B) | | | |
| 2014 | 2 697 | 308 | 856 | 3 861 | 8.4% |
| 2015 | 3 169 | 389 | 877 | 4 462 | 9.5% |
| 2016 | 4 004 | 462 | 900 | 5 366 | 11.5% |
| 2017 | 4 966 | 607 | 966 | 6 539 | 14.3% |
| 2018 | 5 352 | 722 | 972 | 7 046 | 14.8% |
| 2019 | 6 280 | 730 | 899 | 7 909 | 16.2% |
| 2020 | 6 247 | 575 | 854 | 7 676 | 15.2% |
| 2021 (Aug) | 4 470 | 393 | 592 | 5 455 | 15.7% |

Note: * GoRs managed by private cemeteries include the GoR in the Junk Bay Chinese Permanent Cemetery and the GoR in the Pokfulam Chinese Christian Cemetery.