

申訴專員公署
Office of The Ombudsman



主動調查行動報告
Direct Investigation Operation Report

房屋署對公共屋邨的管理：冷氣機滴水
Housing Department's Management of
Public Housing Estates: Air-conditioner Dripping

報告完成日期：2025年8月1日
Completion Date: 1 August 2025

報告公布日期：2025年8月7日
Announcement Date: 7 August 2025

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Executive Summary **Direct Investigation Operation Report**

Housing Department's Management of Public Housing Estates: Air-conditioner Dripping

Introduction

Public housing provides homes for the grassroots. Currently, over 780,000 households, comprising nearly 2 million residents, live in 195 public rental housing (“PRH”) estates managed by the Housing Department (“HD”). The daily management of PRH estates involves an extensive range of areas, and proper management of public housing is an important issue affecting people’s livelihoods.

2. This direct investigation operation focuses on handling and enforcement of air-conditioner water dripping of PRH estates, examining HD’s handling of complaints about air-conditioner dripping, enforcement actions, monitoring of property services agents (“PSAs”), and collaboration with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”).
3. Nothing about people’s livelihoods is trivial. The nuisance caused by air-conditioner dripping should not be overlooked. Over the years, HD has made extensive efforts to tackle this problem including the implementation of the air-conditioner drain-pipe installation programme and the classification of air-conditioner dripping as a misdeed under the Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement (“Marking Scheme”). With HD’s continuous efforts, the problem of air-conditioner dripping has been significantly alleviated. Despite the growth of PRH population, the number of complaints received by HD dropped by 93% from around 18,900 in 2005 to an average of around 1,300 in recent three years (i.e. 2022 to 2024), or only seven complaints annually per estate. This remarkable accomplishment merits recognition and appreciation.
4. However, air-conditioner dripping nuisance remains a typical problem every summer. HD bears the responsibility to enhance its handling to further ensure a quality and hygienic environment for residents. With the sharp decline in complaint cases, there should be rooms for further enhancement on HD’s workflow in handling each complaint. Overall, the Office has the following comments and recommendations concerning HD’s enforcement against air-conditioner dripping in PRH estates.

Our Findings and Comments

(I) Monitoring of PSAs to be Strengthened

5. Among the PRH estates managed by HD, around two-thirds are “outsourced

estates” with the property management outsourced to PSAs, while one-third are directly managed by HD (“directly-managed estates”).

6. Between 2022 and 2024, outsourced and directly-managed estates respectively received 2,826 and 1,049 complaints about air-conditioner dripping. During those years, related complaints rose by 45.5% in outsourced estates and 20.1% in directly-managed estates. In 2024, 10.6% of the complaints in outsourced estates were repeated complaints, compared to 6.3% in directly-managed estates. These figures reflect that directly-managed estates outperformed outsourced estates, where outsources estates had a higher increase in number of complaints and more repeated complaints.

7. Over the same period, PSAs issued 6,307 letters of reminder in outsourced estates, while HD issued 170 reminder letters in directly-managed estates. On average, PSAs issued two reminder letters per complaint received in outsourced estates, which was tenfold of those issued in directly-managed estates.

8. The Office notes that air-conditioner dripping constitutes a misdeed under the Marking Scheme, where such enforcement measures as issuance of warnings and allotment of penalty points are applicable according to circumstances. However, the Marking Scheme does not include an option of issuing reminder letters. During our inquiry and investigation, initially HD had not yet formulated guidelines for issuing reminder letters, nor were PSAs required to report the issuance of reminder letters to the Department.

9. There were cases revealing that despite of repeated issuance of reminder letters dripping problem still occurred. Even though it has a mechanism in place to monitor the performance of PSAs, HD remains at a relatively passive position as it can hardly ensure whether PSAs are issuing too many reminder letters and determine whether there is any mishandling of air-conditioner dripping cases.

10. The Office is pleased to note that HD introduced in December 2024 enhancement measures under the Marking Scheme, including launching standardised “advisory letters”, granting a uniform grace period of five days, and reminding tenants of the consequences of not rectifying the problem, such as allotment of penalty points or even termination of the tenancy.

11. The Office recommends that HD explore the formulation of measures for monitoring the issuance of advisory letters and case reporting to strengthen its supervision of PSAs. To facilitate monitoring, HD should also explore ways to record the details and follow-up of dripping complaints more systematically.

(II) HD’s Operational Guidelines to be Enhanced

12. The Office finds HD’s operational guidelines for handling air-conditioner dripping cases rather brief, with only the procedures for enforcing the Marking Scheme. No detailed instructions are given to frontline staff on such aspects as complaint

investigation, source detection, air-conditioner testing (including its duration), dealing with uncooperative tenants, and arranging follow-up inspections.

13. In our view, without appropriate guidance, frontline staff may handle cases inconsistently. A case showed that security staff closed the case solely based on the rooftop inspection without entering the flat in question to switch on and test the air-conditioner, which was not quite prudent. Moreover, the estate management office failed to effectively deal with the tenant's repeated refusals for indoor testing. In another case, we note that security staff attempted ground-level observation and indoor testing, but no follow-up inspection has been carried out in a systematic manner.

14. The Office recommends that HD consider enhancing its operational guidelines for handling air-conditioner dripping cases based on the specific circumstances of PRH estates and its estate management experience, enabling frontline management staff to work in clarity and effectively. The guidelines should cover procedures involved in different stages of handling, including how to tackle with uncooperative tenants, detection of dripping sources, testing of air-conditioners and follow-up inspections etc.

(III) Reminder Letters and Advisory Letters

15. The Office understands that HD adopts an enforcement approach with a balance between reason and compassion against air-conditioner dripping cases. Nevertheless, in certain cases we examined, although the estate management office had identified the source of dripping, it only gave verbal advice and issued reminder letters repeatedly without activating the Marking Scheme. While reminder letter is advisory in nature, a Notification Slip is an enforcement tool under the Marking Scheme. They have fundamentally distinct functions. Without proper guidelines on the issuance of reminder letters, disparity in treatment may occur.

16. Moreover, the Office notes that the reminder letters issued by HD and PSAs vary in both content and the specific requirements imposed on tenants. Given the inconsistent formats of reminder letters, we are pleased to learn that HD has standardised the format of reminder letters, renamed them "advisory letters", and given a uniform grace period of five days for tenants to make rectification. Nevertheless, since advisory letters are issued in cases with the source of dripping already confirmed, we consider further guidelines desirable for handling suspected or uncertain cases.

17. The Office recommends that HD draw up operational guidelines and notices in designated format for cases where the source of dripping has not been determined, admonishing tenants to take the initiative to check their dripping air-conditioners and carry out proper maintenance.

(IV) Limitations of the Method for Identifying Dripping Air-Conditioners

18. According to HD, in most complaint cases, enforcement staff are able to enter the flats concerned for inspection or observe from outside the flats. As such, the usual

approach is to visually identify the source of dripping with the aid of binoculars.

19. The Office considers that visual observation has significant limitations. A case we examined showed that when a building has multiple sources of dripping, it was difficult to accurately identify the sources solely by ground-level visual observation, even with the aid of binoculars. The Office recommends that HD expedite and broaden the adoption of innovative technologies to strengthen its ability to detect dripping air-conditioners.

(V) Enhancing Staff Training

20. The Office is pleased to note that since the implementation of enhancement measures under the Marking Scheme in December 2024, HD has updated the relevant operational manual and provided a series of training for frontline staff. Regarding the authorisation of security supervisors and building supervisors to enforce the Marking Scheme, HD has also optimised the Notification Slip and produced a simplified version of the operational manual to facilitate frontline staff's performance of duties. Given the turnover of staff, we recommend that HD continue to strengthen staff training on enforcing the Marking Scheme, particularly on handling air-conditioner dripping, to enhance enforcement efficiency.

(VI) Stepping Up Publicity and Education

21. To properly address the issue of air-conditioner dripping in PRH estates, HD bears the responsibility to follow up on complaints proactively and take appropriate enforcement actions against non-compliant tenants. However, tenants' self-discipline is also crucial. We recommend that HD continue to step up publicity and education for PRH residents, particularly emphasising that air-conditioner dripping will incur penalty points and must be promptly rectified upon detection.

22. During the summer of 2024, FEHD launched a pilot operation codenamed "CLEARSKY" in selected districts. In addition to proactive inspections of air-conditioner dripping blackspots, FEHD also stepped up publicity and education. We consider these large-scale inspections and outreach initiatives conducive to enhancing enforcement effectiveness and raising public awareness of compliance.

23. The Office recommends that HD consider collaborating with other government departments (such as FEHD) to explore opportunities of conducting large-scale inspections as well as publicity and education campaigns, with a view to increasing public engagement, boosting awareness of proper air-conditioner maintenance, and encouraging tenants affected by dripping air conditioners to join efforts in detecting the source.

Our Recommendations

24. Overall, we recommend that HD:

- (1) require PSAs to report to HD cases where problems remain unresolved after issuing advisory letters and the Notification Slip;
- (2) explore the formulation of measures for monitoring the issuance of advisory letters and case reporting to strengthen its supervision of PSAs;
- (3) explore how to record the details and follow-up of dripping complaints more systematically to facilitate monitoring;
- (4) consider collaborating with other government departments (such as FEHD) to exchange views on how to conduct systematic analysis and arrange targeted inspections;
- (5) consider collaboration with other government departments (such as FEHD) to exchange views on the template for recording air-conditioner dripping cases to facilitate follow-up and monitoring;
- (6) consider enhancing its operational guidelines for handling air-conditioner dripping cases, enabling estate management staff to work in clarity and effectively;
- (7) beef up the operational guidelines with clear procedures for frontline staff to investigate the source of dripping, including making every effort to enter suspected flats for air-conditioner testing where there is no other way to verify the source of dripping, for example, when the source cannot be determined through external observation, standardising the durations for testing, and specifying follow-up actions when the source remains unidentified;
- (8) consider stipulating in the operational guidelines that frontline staff must conduct follow-up inspections to ensure dripping air-conditioners are properly repaired;
- (9) elaborate in the operational guidelines on how to deal with uncooperative tenants effectively and firmly;
- (10) draw up operational guidelines and notices in designated format for cases where the source of dripping has not been determined;
- (11) consider requiring PSAs to include in their monthly reports the number of advisory letters issued and any repeated cases to facilitate problem detection and follow-up;

- (12) expedite and broaden the adoption of innovative technologies to strengthen its ability to detect dripping air-conditioners;
- (13) continuously strengthen staff training on enforcing the Marking Scheme, particularly on handling air-conditioner dripping cases, to improve enforcement efficiency;
- (14) continuously step up publicity and education for PRH residents before and during summer, emphasising that air-conditioner dripping will incur penalty points and must be promptly rectified upon detection; and
- (15) consider collaborating with other government departments (such as FEHD) to explore opportunities of conducting large-scale inspections as well as publicity and education campaigns, with a view to increasing public engagement and boosting awareness of proper air-conditioner maintenance.

Office of The Ombudsman

August 2025

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1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

1.1 Public housing provides homes for the grassroots. The daily management of public rental housing (“PRH”) estates involves an extensive range of areas, and proper management of public housing is an important issue affecting people’s livelihoods. In light of this, this Office will launch in-depth investigations into various related topics. This direct investigation operation focuses on the handling of and enforcement against air-conditioner dripping cases across 195 PRH estates—home to about two million residents—managed by the Housing Department (“HD”).

1.2 Under the Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement (“Marking Scheme”), air-conditioner dripping is classified as a misdeed. This Office has received recurring complaints regarding this issue in PRH estates, with around 75 cases reported during the five years between 2020 and 2024. Such dripping can cause hygiene-related nuisances and noise disturbances.

1.3 In this connection, we notified HD on 19 March 2025 of the initiation of this direct investigation operation under section 7(1)(a)(ii) of The Ombudsman Ordinance to examine its enforcement against air-conditioner dripping in PRH estates and make pertinent recommendations for improvement where necessary¹.

SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

1.4 Centred on PRH estates, this direct investigation operation examines HD’s handling of complaints about air-conditioner dripping, enforcement actions, monitoring of property services agents (“PSAs”), and communication and collaboration with other government departments, including the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”).

¹ This Office also completed a direct investigation operation “Government Departments’ Handling of the Problem of Air-conditioner Dripping” in April 2018, which examined the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department’s enforcement against air-conditioner dripping in private buildings.

PROCESS OF INVESTIGATION

1.5 On 4 June 2025, we sent the draft investigation report to HD and FEHD for comments. Their responses were received on 18 June and 14 July. After considering and incorporating their comments as appropriate, we completed this report on 1 August.

2

HD'S HANDLING OF AND ENFORCEMENT AGAINST AIR-CONDITIONER DРИPPING CASES

ESTATE MANAGEMENT MODE

2.1 Given the sheer number of PRH flats, HD outsources property management for some estates to PSAs. Among the PRH estates managed by HD, around two-thirds (132 estates with around 470,000 households) are “outsourced estates” with the property management outsourced to PSAs, while one-third (59 estates with around 280,000 households) are directly managed by HD (“directly-managed estates”)².

2.2 In outsourced estates, HD procures property management services through contractual agreements with PSAs. Appointed PSAs are responsible for daily estate management (including handling air-conditioner dripping), overseeing maintenance works, delivering frontline tenancy management services, and addressing residents’ enquiries and complaints. Upon receiving a complaint about air-conditioner dripping, the PSA’s security staff conduct a preliminary investigation to identify the source of dripping and report their findings to the PSA for taking appropriate follow-up actions. HD regularly assesses the performance of PSAs through monitoring mechanisms at both district and headquarters levels.

2.3 In directly-managed estates, HD contracts out cleansing and security services to service contractors. Upon receiving a complaint about air-conditioner dripping, the appointed security contractor assigns its staff to conduct a preliminary investigation into the source of dripping and submit a report to HD for follow-up. HD also regularly assesses the performance of these contractors through monitoring mechanisms at both district and headquarters levels.

² Four other PRH estates are jointly managed by HD and PSAs.

2.4 In both outsourced and directly-managed estates, when a complaint is received, the relevant tenants will be contacted through various channels, such as home visits, phone calls and written correspondence. Dripping sources are identified through indoor inspections or observations from outside or neighbouring flats.

DATA ON AIR-CONDITIONER DRIPPING COMPLAINTS

2.5 Data on air-conditioner dripping complaints received by HD between 2022 and 2024 is shown in **Table 1 (Outsourced estates)** and **Table 2 (Directly-managed estates)**:

**Table 1: Complaints about air-conditioner dripping in PRH estates
(Outsourced estates)**

Year	Approximate total no. of households in outsourced estates	No. of complaints received by HD*	Average handling time # (Days)	No. of complaints with follow-up completed within 30 days	No. of complaints with follow-up completed within 1 to 3 months	No. of complaints with follow-up not completed over 3 months
2022	458,000	770 (56)	12.58	736	34	0
2023	458,000	936 (93)	14.80	874	62	0
2024	467,000	1,120 (119)	14.08	1,060	60	0

* The number of complaints received accounted for 0.17%, 0.20% and 0.24% of the total number of households in 2022, 2023 and 2024, respectively.

() Figures in brackets represent the number of repeated complaints.

“Handling time” refers to the duration from the receipt of a complaint, through follow-up by estate management staff, to the issuance of a substantive reply to the complainant.

**Table 2: Complaints about air-conditioner dripping in PRH estates
(Directly-managed estates)**

Year	Approximate total no. of households in directly-managed estates	No. of complaints received by HD*	Average handling time # (Days)	No. of complaints with follow-up completed within 30 days	No. of complaints with follow-up completed within 1 to 3 months	No. of complaints with follow-up not completed over 3 months
2022	278,000	328 (29)	11.38	310	18	0
2023	278,000	327 (28)	13.88	295	32	0
2024	279,000	394 (25)	11.16	381	13	0

* The number of complaints received accounted for 0.12%, 0.12% and 0.14% of the total number of households in 2022, 2023 and 2024, respectively.

() Figures in brackets represent the number of repeated complaints.

“Handling time” refers to the duration from the receipt of a complaint, through follow-up by estate management staff, to the issuance of a substantive reply to the complainant.

2.6 Based on further analysis of the figures in **Tables 1** and **2**, between 2022 and 2024, complaints about air-conditioner dripping rose by 45.5% in outsourced estates and 20.1% in directly-managed estates. In 2024, 10.6% of the complaints in outsourced estates were repeated complaints, compared to 6.3% in directly-managed estates. In terms of the proportion of complaints over the number of households, outsourced estates recorded percentages of 0.17%, 0.20% and 0.24% in 2022, 2023 and 2024 respectively while directly-managed estates recorded percentages of 0.12%, 0.12% and 0.14% during the same period.

ENFORCEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AIR-CONDITIONER DRIPPING COMPLAINTS

Marking Scheme

2.7 Under the Marking Scheme, air-conditioner dripping is classified as a misdeed, and offenders are liable to five penalty points.

Enforcement procedures before implementation of enhanced Marking Scheme in December 2024

2.8 According to the Operation Manual of the Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement in Public Housing Estates (“Marking Scheme Operation Manual”) applicable before December 2024, HD issued a **Notification for**

Rectification³ to first-time offenders, requiring rectification within a specified period. A **warning letter** was also issued, stating that penalty points would be allotted to repeat offenders immediately. Before December 2024, five days were generally given for rectification. In more complex cases, such as those involving the replacement of a drip tray or even the entire air-conditioner, estate managers might exercise discretion to extend the rectification period to a maximum of 14 days. Further extensions might be granted for justified cases, such as households consisting entirely of elderly persons or individuals with mobility issues who required assistance.

2.9 If a tenant ignored the warning or repeated the misdeed, HD would issue another **Notification for Rectification**, followed by a **Notification Letter on Allotment of Points** (five points). Although repeated misdeeds triggered immediate point allotment without further warnings, tenants were sometimes unaware of dripping due to the design or installation position of the air-conditioners. Therefore, estate management staff might exercise discretion as they thought fit to grant a five-day grace period before enforcing the Marking Scheme. If the problem remained unresolved after the grace period, penalty points would be allotted. Tenants accumulating 16 valid penalty points within two years would be issued a Notice-to-Quit by HD to terminate their tenancy.

2.10 HD stated that the procedures for handling air-conditioner dripping complaints and the enforcement actions were largely the same in both directly-managed and outsourced estates. The sole distinction was that in outsourced estates, PSAs had to report to the relevant District Tenancy Management Office (“DTMO”) of HD within a specified time frame after issuing a Notification for Rectification. The DTMO would then issue either a warning letter or a Notification Letter on Allotment of Points to the tenant.

Enforcement procedures after implementation of enhanced Marking Scheme in December 2024

2.11 On 19 July 2024, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (“HKHA”) reviewed the Marking Scheme and approved the enhanced measures. The enforcement mechanism of the scheme, including the procedures for handling air-conditioner dripping, were also optimised. The relevant measures came into effect on 1 December 2024. HD updated the Marking Scheme Operation Manual with the following revisions applicable to handling air-conditioner dripping cases:

- (1) Given that air-conditioner dripping is not a deliberate misdeed and may go unnoticed by tenants, HD adopts a more empathetic approach. Prior to enforcing the Marking Scheme, an **advisory letter** will be issued to tenants—regardless of whether they are first-time or repeat offenders—requiring rectification within a five-day grace period. For first-time offenders, if the problem persists beyond the grace period, HD will issue both a **Notification Slip** (new designation effective 1 December 2024) and

³ It was renamed “Notification Slip” on 1 December 2024.

a **Written Warning** requiring rectification within 14 days, failing which penalty points will be allotted. For repeat offenders, if the problem persists beyond the grace period, HD will issue both a **Notification Slip** and a **Notification Letter on Allotments of Points** simultaneously to allot penalty points immediately.

- (2) To support the five-day grace period arrangement, HD has prepared an advisory letter template for frontline estate management staff. It advises tenants to rectify the problem within **five days** from the date of issuance, or HD will enforce the Marking Scheme. It also reminds tenants that accumulating 16 valid points within two years will result in tenancy termination.
- (3) Previously, security staff of PSAs were not authorised to issue rectification notices to offenders. Instead, they were required to gather evidence and refer cases to estate officers for processing and issuance of notices, a process that typically took one to two days. To expedite the handling of such cases, HD has expanded the scope of enforcement personnel to include estate security supervisors under the optimised system. These supervisors are now authorised to issue Notification Slips on the spot. HD's District Property Service Administration Units ("PSAUs") monitor the performance of both security supervisors and PSAs to ensure that air-conditioner dripping problems are handled in accordance with the Marking Scheme Operation Manual.

2.12 HD stated that upon receiving a complaint about air-conditioner dripping, staff are deployed immediately to investigate and identify the source of dripping and follow up accordingly. Air-conditioner dripping is not a deliberate misdeed and may go unnoticed by tenants, and it may take longer time to resolve the problem given the wide range of possible causes, such as ageing drainage hoses, blockages in drain outlets or pipes due to dust or grit, loose connections where drainage hoses are not securely inserted into drainage pipes on external wall, and situations where erection of scaffolding is necessary for air-conditioner replacement; pipe joints may also be dislodged by external factors like typhoons or strong winds. Therefore, HD handles cases with both reasonableness and compassion. An advisory letter is first issued to urge tenants to proactively resolve the problem and address the difficulties involved. For tenants in need or requiring special consideration, such as elderly households or those with health concerns, HD offers appropriate support, including technical assistance. For tenants who fail to rectify the problem despite repeated reminders, HD proceeds in accordance with the Marking Scheme Operation Manual. HD indicated that in both outsourced and directly-managed estates, all cases are completed within an average of approximately two weeks, with a quarter of cases completed within seven days.

2.13 Data on HD's enforcement actions against air-conditioner dripping are shown in **Table 3 (Outsourced estates)** and **Table 4 (Directly-managed estates)**.

**Table 3: Enforcement actions against air-conditioner dripping
(Outsourced estates)**

Year	Complaints received	Notifications for Rectification [#]	Warning letters	Point allotments	Appeals against point allotments
2022	770 (56)	18 (1)	17 (0)	2 (0)	0 (0)
2023	936 (93)	23 (1)	21 (0)	4 (1)	0 (0)
2024	1,120 (119)	58 (6)	48 (0)	11 (2)	0 (0)

Notifications for Rectification are issued to both first-time (subject to warning) and repeat offenders (subject to point allotment). Therefore, the number of Notifications for Rectification should equal the sum of warning letters and point allotments. In Table 3, point allotments were made in four cases without issuing the standard Notification for Rectification.

() Figures in brackets represent the number of repeated complaints, enforcement actions or appeals.

**Table 4: Enforcement actions against air-conditioner dripping
(Directly-managed estates)**

Year	Complaints received	Notifications for Rectification [#]	Warning letters	Point allotments	Appeals against point allotments
2022	328 (29)	6 (0)	6 (0)	3 (0)	0 (0)
2023	327 (28)	17 (1)	16 (0)	7 (0)	0 (0)
2024	394 (25)	28 (3)	25 (0)	5 (0)	0 (0)

Notifications for Rectification are issued to both first-time (subject to warning) and repeat offenders (subject to point allotment). Therefore, the number of Notifications for Rectification should equal the sum of warning letters and point allotments. In Table 4, point allotments were made in 11 cases without issuing the standard Notification for Rectification.

() Figures in brackets represent the number of repeated complaints, enforcement actions or appeals.

***Reminder Letters Issued Prior to December 2024
(Including Various Forms of Reminder Letters Issued in Cases where the
Source of Dripping was Unidentified)***

2.14 According to HD, prior to December 2024, enforcement actions under the Marking Scheme, as set out in the Marking Scheme Operation Manual, did not include the issuance of reminder letters. Upon receiving a complaint about air-conditioner dripping, estate management staff would carefully investigate and issue a reminder letter to the flat with dripping air-conditioner. However, objective constraints—such as poor lighting at night and limited visibility from observation points—might prevent staff from

immediately determining the source of dripping. To mitigate the nuisance promptly, letters would be issued to suspected flats on the relevant floor, advising residents to inspect their air-conditioners for signs of dripping and to carry out any necessary repairs. These letters came in various formats, including Water Dripping Notices, Friendly Reminders and Water Dripping Notes. Relevant examples are shown in **Figures 1** to **4**. After December 2024, HD has standardised the format and content of these reminder letters, renamed them “advisory letters” and issued guidelines for their issuance and follow-up procedures.

Figure 1: Example of reminder letter issued by PSA

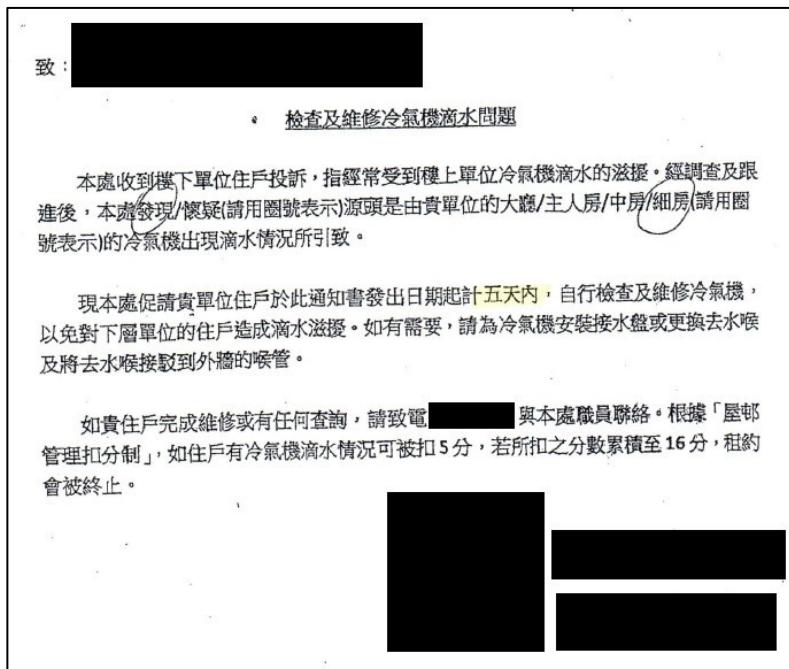


Figure 2: Example of reminder letter issued by PSA

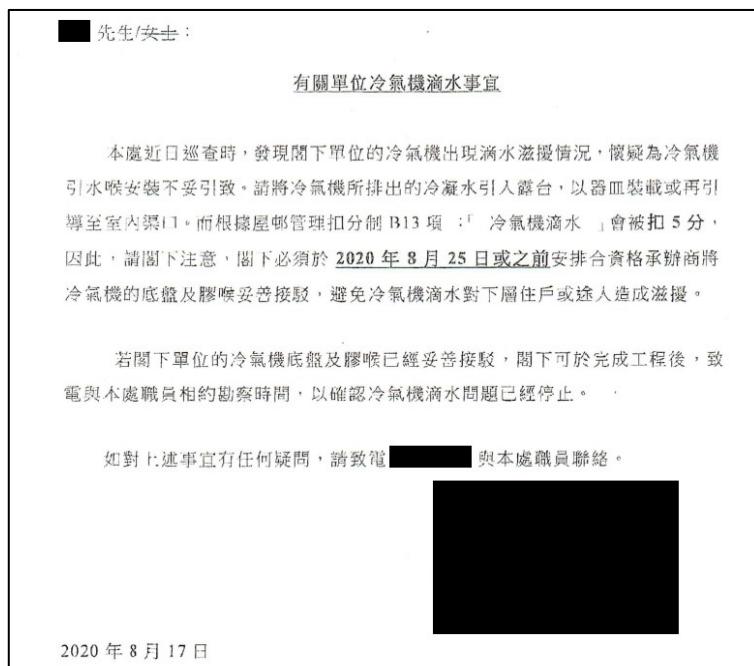


Figure 3: Example of reminder letter issued in directly-managed estate

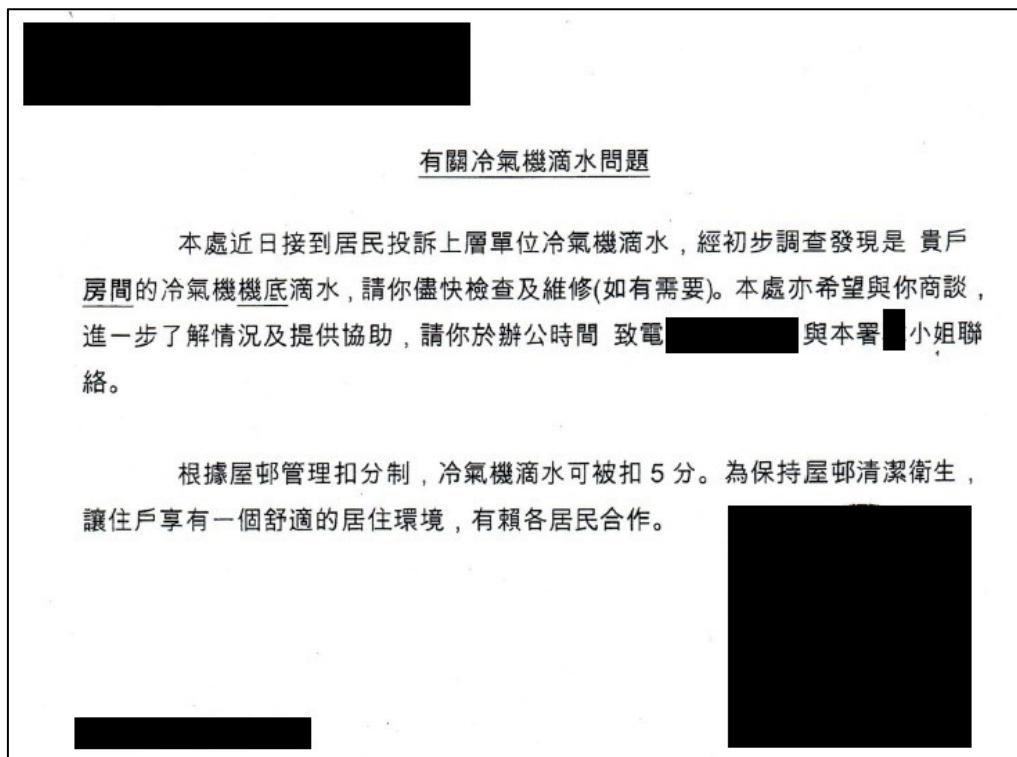
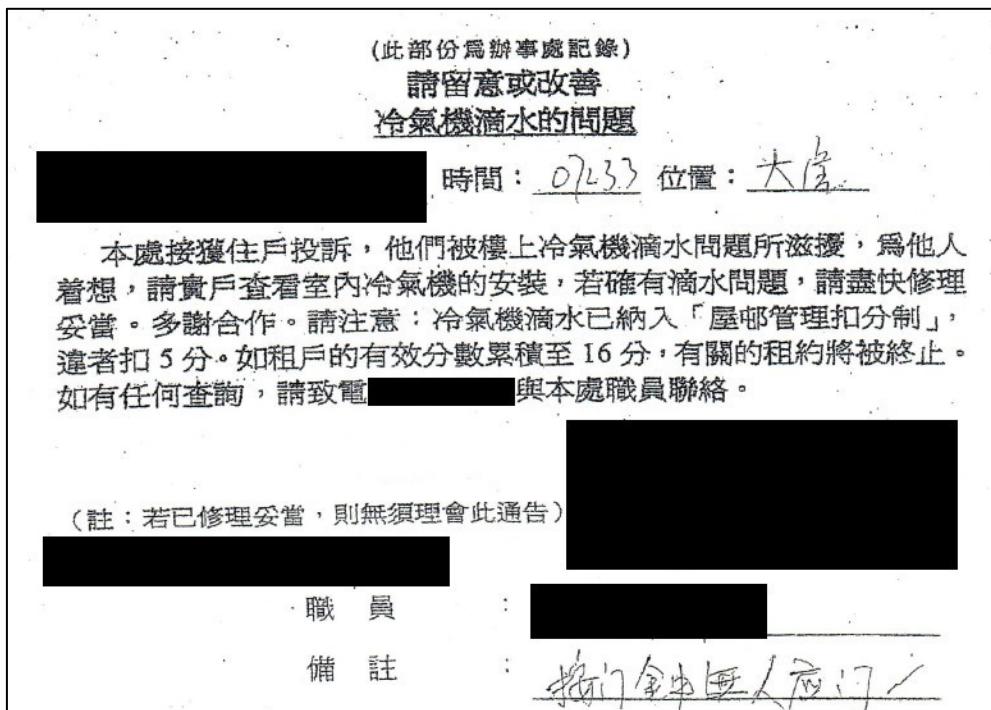


Figure 4: Example of reminder letter issued in directly-managed estate



2.15 As shown in the examples above, the reminder letters issued at the time differed in several aspects: the description of location and the problem identified or suspected, as well as the deadline set for tenants to take remedial action, including whether a deadline was specified and if so, the time frame provided.

2.16 HD compiled data related to reminder letters based on the case records. **Tables 5** and **6** set out the number of reminder letters issued by HD and PSAs to tenants regarding air-conditioner dripping prior to the implementation of the enhanced Marking Scheme in December 2024.

Table 5: Number of reminder letters issued by PSAs regarding air-conditioner dripping

Year	Approximate total no. of households in outsourced estates	No. of reminder letters issued in outsourced estates *
2022	458,000	1,751 (2)
2023	458,000	2,355 (2)
2024 [#]	467,000	2,201 (38)

* The number of reminder letters issued for air-conditioner dripping accounted for 0.38%, 0.51% and 0.47% of the number of households in 2022, 2023 and 2024, respectively.

() Figures in brackets represent the number of cases with repeated enforcement.

In December 2024, HD implemented the enhanced Marking Scheme, streamlining the procedures for handling air-conditioner dripping misdeed. An advisory letter template was introduced along with a uniform five-day grace period.

Table 6: Number of reminder letters issued in directly-managed estates regarding air-conditioner dripping

Year	Approximate total no. of households in directly-managed estates	No. of reminder letters issued in directly-managed estates *
2022	278,000	45 (1)
2023	278,000	85 (1)
2024 [#]	279,000	40 (3)

* The number of reminder letters issued for air-conditioner dripping accounted for 0.02%, 0.03% and 0.01% of the number of households in 2022, 2023 and 2024, respectively.

() Figures in brackets represent the number of cases with repeated enforcement.

In December 2024, HD implemented the enhanced Marking Scheme, streamlining the procedures for handling air-conditioner dripping misdeed. An advisory letter template was introduced, along with a uniform five-day grace period.

2.17 Regarding the notably higher number of reminder letters issued in outsourced estates compared to directly-managed estates, HD explained that before the enhanced Marking Scheme was implemented in December 2024, security staff in outsourced estates, unlike their counterparts in directly-managed estates, were not authorised to issue Notifications for Rectification under the Marking Scheme on the spot. To tackle air-conditioner dripping, PSAs issued reminder letters to help identify the source of dripping or to alert offenders. In some cases, reminder letters were also sent to suspected flats nearby. These practices resulted in more reminder letters being issued

compared to directly-managed estates. Moreover, outsourced estates often comprise high-rise buildings, making it more difficult to visually pinpoint the source of dripping from the outside. Consequently, PSAs often have to issue reminder letters to multiple upper-floor flats that might be the source of dripping, further contributing to the higher number of letters issued. Nevertheless, PSAs make every effort to trace the source of dripping. HD emphasised that in both outsourced and directly-managed estates, reminder letters aim to resolve dripping problems promptly while balancing between reasonableness and compassion.

2.18 In 2022, 2023 and 2024, PSAs issued the vast majority of reminder letters on air-conditioner dripping—accounting for 97.5%, 96.5% and 98.2% of the total, respectively. By comparison, directly-managed estates issued only 2.5%, 3.5% and 1.8% during the same period. Although HD explained that the number of letters issued was influenced by estate conditions and other factors, we consider that these factors should not have led to such a significant discrepancy between directly-managed and outsourced estates. The fact that PSAs continue to issue a disproportionately higher number of reminder letters compared to directly-managed estates raises concerns.

2.19 In this regard, this Office compares the total number of complaints shown in **Tables 1** and **2** with the number of reminder letters set out in **Tables 5** and **6**.

**Table 7: Ratio of complaints to reminder letters
(Outsourced estates)**

Year	No. of complaints received by HD (a)	No. of reminder letters issued by PSAs regarding air-conditioner dripping (b)	Average no. of reminder letters issued per complaint (b) / (a)
2022	770	1,751	2.27
2023	936	2,355	2.52
2024 [#]	1,120	2,201	1.97

[#] In December 2024, HD implemented the enhanced Marking Scheme, streamlining the procedures for handling air-conditioner dripping misdeed. An advisory letter template was introduced, along with a uniform five-day grace period.

**Table 8: Ratio of complaints to reminder letters
(Directly-managed estates)**

Year	No. of complaints received by HD (a)	No. of reminder letters issued regarding air-conditioner dripping (b)	Average no. of reminder letters issued per complaint (b) / (a)
2022	328	45	0.14
2023	327	85	0.26
2024 [#]	394	40	0.10

[#] In December 2024, HD implemented the enhanced Marking Scheme, streamlining the procedures for handling air-conditioner dripping misdeed. An advisory letter template was introduced, along with a uniform five-day grace period.

2.20 Tables 7 and 8 indicate that outsourced estates issued an average of approximately 1.97 to 2.52 reminder letters per air-conditioner dripping complaint, whereas directly-managed estates issued only approximately 0.10 to 0.26 letters per complaint. This reflects a substantial difference in the handling practices between the two types of PRH estates. It is worth noting that issuing reminder letters is not a requirement under the Marking Scheme, which already includes a warning mechanism.

2.21 The figures also suggest that PSAs tend to issue multiple reminder letters for a single case, while directly-managed estates generally do not rely on such letters to follow up on air-conditioner dripping.

2.22 Nonetheless, this Office is pleased to note that following a review of the procedures for handling air-conditioner dripping cases, HD has standardised the format of reminder letters by introducing an advisory letter template, and established guidelines for their issuance and follow-up (see para. 2.11).

REGULAR INSPECTIONS

2.23 In addition to handling complaints, frontline staff of the security service contractors engaged by HD and PSAs are required to conduct daily patrols of public areas in PRH estates. These patrols include inspecting public facilities and hygienic conditions, as well as identifying any instances of air-conditioner dripping.

2.24 Furthermore, HD deploys Special Operation Teams (“SOT”) to rove around PRH estates, including outsourced estates, to monitor and detect misdeeds under the Marking Scheme. If air-conditioner dripping is discovered during patrols, the SOT will conduct a preliminary investigation into the source and submit the findings along with a record of actions taken to the estate management office (“EMO”) for follow-up.

2.25 In March 2024, HD launched a pilot scheme for the “Mobile Application System for Daily Patrol” in 10 selected PRH estates. Under the scheme, frontline estate management staff, including security staff, building supervisors and security supervisors, are equipped with dedicated mobile devices installed with the “Mobile Application System for Daily Patrol”. By enabling real-time reporting of issues identified during patrols, such as air-conditioner dripping, the system facilitates timely follow-up actions and enhances management efficiency. For example, when security staff observe a dripping air-conditioner during a patrol, they can record the situation using their dedicated mobile devices, upload photos and details to the system, and alert management staff to respond promptly on site. HD plans to gradually roll out the “Mobile Application System for Daily Patrol” to other PRH estates across Hong Kong.

MONITORING OF PSAs

2.26 HKHA appoints licensed PSAs through contractual agreements to manage outsourced estates. These appointed PSAs are required to perform daily estate management duties, including handling complaints about air-conditioner dripping, in accordance with HD’s internal guidelines and contract terms. To ensure that PSAs fulfil their contractual obligations, HD has established contract management and performance evaluation mechanisms. These mechanisms enable HD to monitor PSAs’ performance across various areas and assign performance ratings accordingly. Each district under HD has a PSAU overseeing PSAs’ compliance with contractual requirements and fulfilment of management duties. HD monitors the performance of PSAs through multiple means, including reviewing estate management reports, conducting monthly site inspections, and assigning performance ratings monthly.

2.27 PSAs are required to submit monthly management reports to HD, summarising the complaints handled and enforcement actions taken during the month. Complaints about air-conditioner dripping are also covered in these reports, with examples provided in **Figures 5 to 7**.

Examples of estate management reports
Figure 5

7. Enforcement Action 
A special squad against noise nuisance complaints & water dripping from air-conditioners conducted inspection at [REDACTED] <u>No noise nuisance and water dripping case was detected.</u>

Figure 6

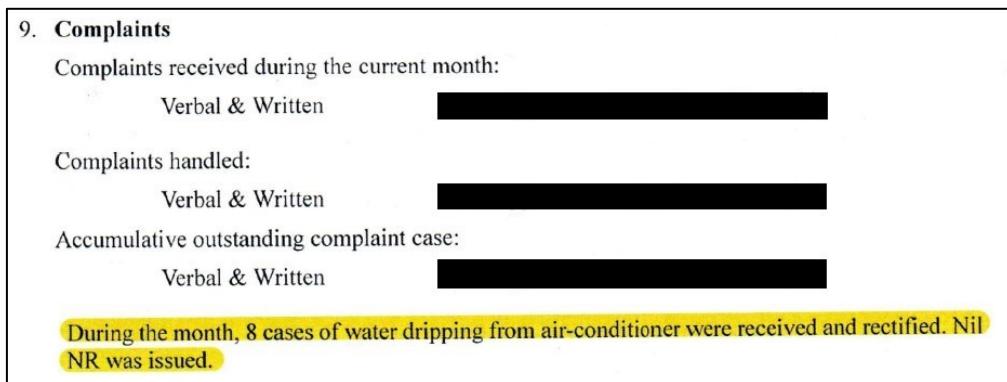
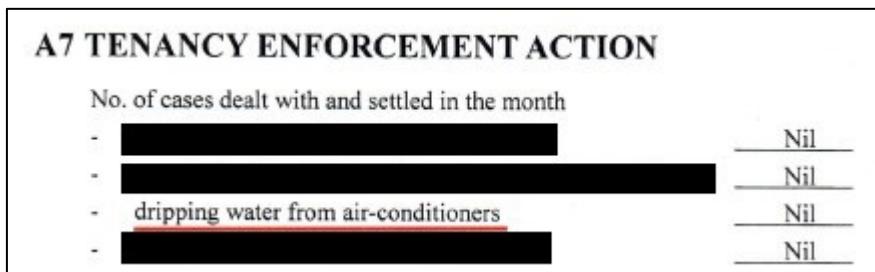


Figure 7



2.28 HD conducts monthly site inspections to assess PSAs' performance in areas such as complaint handling, security services and implementation of the Marking Scheme. One of the tasks during security inspections is to check for any signs of air-conditioner dripping. These site inspections enable HD to effectively monitor PSAs' discharge of management duties and service quality. Each month, HD evaluates the performance of PSAs in three key areas—estate management, construction works and building services—and assigns performance ratings accordingly.

2.29 When handling air-conditioner dripping cases, PSAs not only report to HD any enforcement actions taken under the Marking Scheme, but also, based on their professional judgement, proactively seek guidance from HD's PSAUs on particularly challenging cases when necessary, and report the progress in accordance with instructions. In addition to reviewing the monthly management reports submitted by PSAs (see **para. 2.27**), HD headquarters and its District PSAUs monitor and follow up on air-conditioner dripping incidents and related complaints through the following mechanisms:

- (1) Complaints management system: HD has established an integrated computer platform “Complaints and Requests Management System”. The system refers dripping complaints to the relevant PSAUs, which then forward them to PSAs for follow-up;
- (2) Surprise inspections: District property services managers and senior property services managers conduct unscheduled site inspections of PRH estates to directly monitor the performance of PSAs;

- (3) Proactive intervention: If dripping problems are frequent, remain unresolved over time and result in repeated complaints, PSAUs will instruct PSAs to further investigate and, when necessary, intervene directly; and
- (4) Works coordination: When works are involved, such as erecting scaffolding on external walls to replace air-conditioners or repair drainage pipes in certain flats, PSAs will proactively seek further instructions from PSAUs.

2.30 PSAs are required to report air-conditioner dripping cases where actions have been taken under the Marking Scheme (see **para. 2.10**). According to HD, there is no evidence indicating any mishandling of cases reported between 2022 and 2024 that precluded HD from issuing warning letters or Notification Letters on Allotment of Points.

2.31 Complaints and statistics related to air-conditioner dripping are included in the monthly management reports submitted by PSAs to PSAUs. HD can obtain details through existing monitoring mechanisms and channels (see **para. 2.29**).

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF AIR-CONDITIONER DRIPPING

2.32 In most complaint cases, enforcement staff are able to enter the flats concerned for inspection or observe from outside the flats. As such, the usual approach is to visually identify the source of dripping with the aid of binoculars. In recent years, HD has endeavoured to advance smart estate management. In the summer of 2024, HD initiated trials of professional-grade handheld thermal imaging cameras across all PRH estates in rotation to help estate management staff detect dripping air-conditioners on external walls. HD has scheduled a second round of trials for the summer of 2025 to further assess the effectiveness of this technology. Meanwhile, based on frontline feedback, HD will proactively explore adopting more compact and cost-effective professional devices to identify dripping sources.

COLLABORATION WITH FEHD

2.33 Under the collaboration mechanism between HD and FEHD, HD is responsible for handling all complaints from PRH tenants regarding air-conditioner dripping. Any such complaints received by FEHD are referred to HD for follow-up. If a complaint is found to be substantiated but HD's follow-up is ineffective, the case will revert to FEHD for enforcement under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (see **Appendix** for an overview of how FEHD handles air-conditioner dripping cases).

2.34 Between 2022 and 2024, HD handled all complaints regarding air-conditioner dripping in a timely manner. As a result, no cases were referred to FEHD for enforcement under the Ordinance.

PUBLICITY AND EDUCATION

2.35 Before and during each summer, HD reminds tenants to regularly maintain and repair their air-conditioners through various channels, such as distributing estate newsletters to each tenant, posting notices in the ground-floor lobbies of PRH blocks, displaying announcements on electronic notice boards in the lobbies, and providing relevant information via the “iHousing” mobile application.

2.36 In December 2024, HD provided frontline estate management staff with targeted training and prepared a simplified workflow chart to assist security supervisors and directly managed estates’ building supervisors in understanding implementation details and performing related duties. Furthermore, the Department plans to launch an instructional video in July 2025 to further support these supervisors in effectively enforcing the Marking Scheme.

INSTALLATION OF CONDENSATION DRAIN PIPES FOR AIR-CONDITIONERS

2.37 HD has implemented multiple measures to address air-conditioner dripping cases. These include the launch of the Installation Programme of Condensation Drain-pipe for Air-conditioners in 2006 to equip PRH flats with condensation drain pipes. Since 2008, air-conditioner dripping has been classified as a misdeed under the Marking Scheme, and HD has conducted publicity and educational campaigns to raise tenants’ awareness of their responsibility to detect signs of dripping, properly maintain their air-conditioners, and carry out timely repairs. Public housing blocks built after 1996 are already fitted with condensation drain pipes, enabling tenants to easily connect their air-conditioners to the drainage system during installation. Regular monitoring by tenants can help prevent nuisance caused by dripping. For blocks built before 1996, HD indicated that for the blocks where the living or dining room adjoins a balcony or verandah, condensate can be discharged through the existing drainage system of these structures. Therefore, installation of condensation drain pipes is not required for such blocks.

2.38 HD stated that installing flexible lead hoses to redirect condensate back indoors, or using condensate-free air-conditioners, are both effective ways to prevent dripping. In blocks where flats are without a balcony or verandah, or where such outdoor spaces are separated from living or dining rooms by kitchens, bathrooms or solid walls, air-conditioners must be installed in window openings on external walls, making proper management of condensate more complex. Some tenants have routed condensate through pipes to the external wall, resulting in water stains. To address

this, HD launched a programme in 2006 to install condensation drain pipes for these buildings, making it easier for tenants to discharge air-conditioner condensate. The installation was fully completed by 2010. Since then, all PRH tenants have been able to directly and conveniently address water dripping from their own air-conditioners through these facilities.

HD'S COMMENTS

2.39 HD noted that air-conditioner dripping differs from other misdeeds under the Marking Scheme. It is not necessarily a deliberate action, but rather a result of various external or unforeseeable factors, such as typhoons or strong winds that dislodge pipe joints, ageing flexible hoses, or blocked condensate drain pipes caused by dust accumulation. HD must consider the installation locations and environmental conditions, and balance between reasonableness and compassion in taking enforcement actions.

3

CASE STUDIES

3.1 This Office selected and examined a random sample of cases (covering both directly-managed and outsourced estates) for detailed analysis:

CASE (1): CASE CLOSED WITHOUT CONDUCTING AIR-CONDITIONER TESTING OR ENFORCING THE MARKING SCHEME AS PER GUIDELINES (OUTSOURCED ESTATE)

3.2 In early September 2023, Mr A, a resident of an outsourced estate, lodged a complaint with the security control room regarding water dripping from the air-conditioner of a flat above. Upon inspection, security staff found that the air-conditioner in the flat two floors above was dripping. A Water Dripping Notice was issued to the tenant concerned, requiring rectification within five days.

3.3 Six days later, staff from the EMO⁴ called the tenant to arrange an air-conditioner test. The tenant stated that the air-conditioner had been repaired but was unable to schedule a test. Security staff conducted a rooftop inspection and confirmed that the air-conditioner was no longer dripping. EMO staff called the tenant seven days later but was unable to schedule a test again, and a second rooftop inspection showed no signs of dripping. As such, the EMO considered the case closed.

3.4 Two days later, Mr A filed another complaint with the EMO about recurring dripping. Security staff inspected the site and found that the same air-conditioner was dripping again. A Water Dripping Notice was issued requiring rectification within five days. As attempts to contact the tenant were unsuccessful, the EMO issued a written reminder urging prompt action. The tenant later agreed to comply. Eight days later, EMO staff followed up by phone to arrange a test, but the tenant refused again.

3.5 In October 2023, Mr A complained to the EMO about the dripping again. Security staff conducted a rooftop inspection and confirmed that the problem persisted. A Water Dripping Notice was issued to the tenant requiring rectification within five days. EMO staff also followed up with a phone call and a written reminder.

⁴ The EMO is operated by a PSA engaged by HKHA.

3.6 Subsequently, the tenant twice refused on phone to schedule a time for the testing. Meanwhile, two additional rooftop inspections showed no signs of dripping. However, in late October, security staff found that the dripping had resumed and issued a Water Dripping Notice again requiring rectification within five days.

3.7 Following our intervention, the EMO concluded that the tenant's repair efforts were inadequate, as the problem had recurred despite ample time allowed for rectification on three separate occasions. To resolve the problem effectively, the EMO issued a Notification for Rectification, requiring action within four days. Two days later, HD and the EMO conducted an air-conditioner test at the tenant's flat and confirmed that the dripping had ceased. Mr A also acknowledged that the problem had been resolved.

Our Analysis

3.8 We consider that upon the initial discovery of the dripping problem, the EMO did promptly contact the tenant to arrange an air-conditioner test after issuing a Water Dripping Notice. Given the tenant's failure to schedule the test, it was understandable that security staff resorted to rooftop inspections to check for dripping. However, concluding the case based solely on the result of rooftop inspections may not be prudent. If the tenant had not repaired the air-conditioner but simply refrained from using it during the inspection, security staff would not have been able to detect whether the dripping persisted. In fact, security staff conducted five rooftop inspections, four of which showed no signs of dripping, yet the complainant continued to report the problem. This suggests that a more prudent approach is to turn on the air-conditioner for testing.

3.9 Furthermore, the Marking Scheme Operation Manual specifies the enforcement actions under the Marking Scheme (see **paras. 2.8 to 2.9**). Despite this, the EMO issued four Water Dripping Notices that were merely advisory in nature. It was only after the fourth instance of discovering water dripping from the tenant's air-conditioner that a Notification for Rectification was issued under the Marking Scheme. This reflects a failure to follow the guidelines. Upon receiving the Notification for Rectification, the tenant took swift action and resolved the problem within two days.

3.10 Following HD's enhancement and optimisation of the Marking Scheme in December 2024, this Office expects that HD staff and PSAs will be able to manage air-conditioner dripping cases more effectively.

CASE (2): REPEATED VERBAL AND WRITTEN REMINDERS WITHOUT ENFORCING THE MARKING SCHEME AS PER GUIDELINES (OUTSOURCED ESTATE)

3.11 In early June 2020, Ms B, a resident of an outsourced estate, lodged a

complaint with the EMO⁵ regarding water dripping from the air-conditioner of a flat above. Security staff promptly followed up and, upon an indoor inspection, found that the drainage outlet of the air-conditioner's drip tray was blocked by leaves, sand and gravel, resulting in the dripping. The tenant immediately cleared the blockage, and security staff confirmed that the dripping had ceased before leaving.

3.12 In early July 2020, Ms B again complained to the EMO about the same problem. Security staff promptly followed up and discovered that the end of the air-conditioner's drain hose had become detached and was protruding outside the balcony, causing the dripping. The tenant repositioned the drain hose back inside the balcony immediately. Two weeks later, the EMO issued a reminder letter to the tenant requesting rectification within eight days.

3.13 In early August 2020, Ms B filed another complaint about continued dripping. Security staff found that the drain hose had once again become detached and was protruding outside the balcony. After being reminded, the tenant repositioned the hose immediately. Security staff confirmed that the dripping had stopped before leaving.

3.14 Subsequently, Ms B continued to complain to the EMO about the nuisance caused by the dripping. Each time, security staff found that the drain hose had become detached and was protruding outside the balcony. The EMO issued two additional reminder letters urging rectification within the specified time frame.

3.15 In September 2020, the tenant finally accepted the EMO's suggestion and used a rope to secure the end of the drain hose inside the balcony, thereby resolving the dripping nuisance.

Our Analysis

3.16 The case demonstrates that although security staff and the EMO responded promptly to each complaint and issued verbal and written reminders repeatedly, the tenant failed to properly secure the drain hose inside the balcony, resulting in the persistent dripping nuisance over a three-month period. The PSA was too lenient in not issuing a Notification for Rectification or a written warning under the Marking Scheme, nor did it allot any penalty points.

CASE (3): INCONSISTENT PROCEDURES FOR TESTING AND REVIEWING AIR-CONDITIONER DRIPPING (DIRECTLY-MANAGED ESTATE)

3.17 In May 2023, Mr C, a resident of a directly-managed estate, lodged a complaint with the EMO regarding water dripping from the air-conditioner of a flat

⁵ The EMO is operated by a PSA engaged by HKHA.

above. Between late May and mid-June, security staff conducted ground-level observations but were unable to identify the source due to the height of the suspected flats. The EMO issued notes to Flats A, B, C and D, requesting that the tenants inspect their air-conditioners and follow up.

3.18 In late June 2023, Mr C lodged another complaint regarding air-conditioner dripping near the master bedroom. EMO staff accessed a neighbouring flat for observation and suspected Flat E to be the source. EMO issued a note to the tenant of Flat E requesting follow-up. This was followed by a phone call by EMO staff, asking the tenant to inspect air-conditioner for any signs of dripping, but the tenant was uncooperative. In early July, security staff and a housing officer observed from the ground using binoculars and again suspected Flat E to be the source. However, they were unable to enter the flat to confirm. Another note was issued. Staff also attempted to contact the tenant by phone, but were unsuccessful. Flat F was also suspected at one point, but subsequent observations from the ground revealed no signs of dripping.

3.19 In mid-July, Mr C continued to report dripping near the master bedroom. Security staff and a housing officer again accessed a neighbouring flat and took photographs confirming that the air-conditioner in Flat E's master bedroom was dripping. As the tenant, who was not a first-time offender, had been given ample time to inspect the air-conditioner but failed to do so, five penalty points were allotted under the Marking Scheme. In late July, the tenant reported that the air-conditioner in the master bedroom had been repaired. Multiple ground-level observations using binoculars by security staff and a housing officer found no further dripping.

3.20 From late July to August 2023, Mr C repeatedly reported to the EMO that the dripping persisted. Based on ground-level observations, security staff suspected that Flats A, B, C, D, G, H, I and J were likely the source of dripping. A note was issued to each of these flats requesting follow-up. Indoor testing of air-conditioners was conducted for Flats A, C, H and J only; the remaining flats were observed from the ground.

3.21 In September 2023, Mr C reported water dripping near both the master and secondary bedrooms. In response, staff conducted follow-up inspections of Flats B, D, E, F, G, H, I and K. No signs of air-conditioner dripping were found in Flats B, F, H, I and K. Meanwhile, no one answered the door of Flats D and G, and access to Flat E was denied due to a young child at home. Security staff and a housing officer observed from the ground and found no signs of dripping.

3.22 In early October 2023, staff once again observed from the ground and suspected that Flat C was the source of dripping. Subsequent indoor testing confirmed that the air-conditioner in Flat C was dripping. A Notification for Rectification and a written warning were issued to Flat C.

Our Analysis

3.23 The case was complex with as many as 11 flats suspected to be the source of dripping. This Office considers the EMO's handling of the case commendable, noting its prompt follow-up on each complaint and decisive enforcement of the Marking Scheme upon confirming the source of dripping.

3.24 Nevertheless, this Office notes inconsistent methods adopted by security staff to test for air-conditioner dripping—alternating between ground-level observations and indoor inspections. Furthermore, no systematic follow-up inspections were conducted to narrow down the source of dripping. There is still room for improvement in these practices.

CASE (4): EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT OF THE MARKING SCHEME RESULTING IN PROMPT RESOLUTION OF DRIPPING PROBLEM (OUTSOURCED ESTATE)

3.25 In late September 2023, Resident D of an outsourced estate complained to the EMO⁶ regarding a nuisance caused by air-conditioner dripping. EMO staff promptly conducted an inspection and identified a specific flat as the source of dripping. On the same day the source was confirmed, the EMO issued a Notification for Rectification to the tenant concerned in accordance with the guidelines.

3.26 In early October 2023, upon receiving the documents submitted by the EMO, the DTMO issued a written warning to the tenant under the Marking Scheme. After the grace period, EMO staff conducted a follow-up inspection and found no recurrence of dripping from the flat.

Our Analysis

3.27 This Office commends the EMO for its prompt response to the complaint and its adherence to the Marking Scheme guidelines. By issuing a Notification for Rectification upon confirming the source of dripping, the EMO facilitated a swift resolution of the problem.

3.28 Consolidating our observations, the above cases reveal that EMOs differ in their standards, procedures and adherence to guidelines when handling complaints related to air-conditioner dripping and taking enforcement actions. These inconsistencies may result in unfairness and unnecessary delays.

⁶ The EMO is operated by a PSA engaged by HKHA.

4

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERALL COMMENTS

4.1 In Hong Kong, most residential flats are fitted with air-conditioners. Without proper cleaning, maintenance and inspection, dripping may occur and cause nuisance to neighbours downstairs, nearby residents and even passers-by. Over the years, HD has made extensive efforts to tackle this problem in PRH estates, including implementing the air-conditioner drain-pipe installation programme and classifying air-conditioner dripping as a misdeed under the Marking Scheme. These efforts have significantly alleviated the problem. Nevertheless, this Office receives complaints from PRH residents every year, which allege inadequate follow-up by HD on reports of dripping from upper-floor flats.

4.2 Nothing about people's livelihoods is trivial. The nuisance caused by air-conditioner dripping should not be overlooked. Despite population growth in PRH estates, complaints received by HD dropped by 93% from around 18,900 in 2005 to an average of around 1,300 annually between 2022 and 2024, or only seven complaints annually per estate. This remarkable accomplishment merits recognition and appreciation.

4.3 Despite the progress, air-conditioner dripping nuisance remains a typical problem every summer. HD bears the responsibility to enhance its handling to further ensure a quality and hygienic environment for residents. With the sharp decline in complaint cases, there should be room for further enhancement on HD's workflow in handling each complaint. However, as illustrated by the real-life cases in **Chapter 3**, EMOs vary in their standards, procedures and adherence to guidelines when handling complaints related to air-conditioner dripping and taking enforcement actions. These inconsistencies may result in unfairness and unnecessary delays. FEHD is another government department responsible for handling air-conditioner dripping cases. HD may consider engaging with FEHD for experience sharing. Details of FEHD's handling procedures are provided in the Appendix for reference. This Office is pleased to note that HD has implemented enhanced measures under the Marking Scheme since December 2024 to improve enforcement efficiency. Overall, this Office has the

following comments and recommendations concerning HD's enforcement against air-conditioner dripping in PRH estates.

(I) MONITORING OF PSAs TO BE STRENGTHENED

4.4 This Office notes that between 2022 and 2024, outsourced and directly-managed estates respectively received 2,826 and 1,049 complaints about air-conditioner dripping (see **Tables 1 and 2**). During those years, related complaints rose by 45.5% in outsourced estates and 20.1% in directly-managed estates. In 2024, 10.6% of the complaints in outsourced estates were repeated complaints, compared to 6.3% in directly-managed estates. These figures reflect that directly-managed estates outperformed outsourced estates, where outsourced estates had a higher increase in the number of complaints and a higher percentage of repeated complaints. HD explained that it assesses the performance of PSAs through monitoring mechanisms at both district and headquarters levels. Given the complexity of causes and issues related to air-conditioner dripping, it is not appropriate to assess PSA performance solely based on the number of complaints. HD has pledged to strengthen its monitoring and management of PSAs through measures such as increasing surprise inspections and proactive interventions in all districts.

4.5 During the three years between 2022 and 2024, PSAs issued 6,307 reminder letters in outsourced estates, while HD issued only 170 in directly-managed estates (see **Tables 5 and 6**). On average, PSAs issued two reminder letters per complaint received in outsourced estates, which was over tenfold of those issued in directly-managed estates (see **Tables 7 and 8**). This indicates that directly-managed estates relied far less on reminder letters to address dripping complaints, reflecting stronger performance compared to outsourced estates. HD explained in **paragraph 2.17** regarding why more reminder letters were issued in outsourced estates.

4.6 This Office notes that air-conditioner dripping constitutes a misdeed under the Marking Scheme, under which such enforcement measures as issuance of warnings and allotment of penalty points are applicable according to circumstances. However, the Marking Scheme does not include an option of issuing reminder letters. At the initial stage of our inquiry and investigation, HD had not yet established guidelines for issuing such letters. If one of the reasons for more reminder letters being issued in outsourced estates was that their security staff were not authorised to issue Notifications for Rectification on the spot and could only issue reminder letters, it reflects that the mechanism was so poorly designed that it hindered PSA staff from effectively and properly performing their duties.

4.7 Furthermore, PSAs are required to report any enforcement action taken under the Marking Scheme to PSAUs and DTMOs. Since issuing reminder letters is not an enforcement action under the Marking Scheme, PSAs are not required to report to HD if they issue reminder letters instead of Notification Slips. In practice, PSAs issue Notification Slips only to tenants who repeatedly ignore warnings. Therefore, even though HD has a mechanism in place to monitor the performance of PSAs (including

surprise spot checks) and is aware of challenging and serious cases (see **para. 2.29**), its role remains relatively passive, making it difficult to effectively monitor whether PSAs are adhering to the Marking Scheme throughout the complaint handling process.

4.8 In **Cases 1 and 2**, the PSAs issued multiple reminder letters and repeatedly advised the tenants to rectify the dripping problem. Although the tenants followed up and temporarily alleviated the nuisance, the underlying problem remained unresolved. While reminder letters—issued outside the Marking Scheme once or even repeatedly—may prompt non-compliant tenants to take action, the process may also prolong the nuisance caused by dripping.

4.9 HD stated that it intervenes from time to time in PSAs' handling of air-conditioner dripping based on specific findings or complaints, and addresses the problems in collaboration with PSAs. This Office considers that if HD only steps in for complex or repeated complaints without ensuring timely handling and reporting under the Marking Scheme, it cannot effectively resolve the problems. HD should require PSAs to report all cases that remain unresolved after issuing advisory letters and Notification Slips.

4.10 Air-conditioner dripping, a misdeed under the Marking Scheme, should be addressed in a standardised manner. **Figures 5 to 7** show that all PSAs record monthly complaints about air-conditioner dripping, but the data only covers the number of complaints received and cases handled. It does not indicate how many reminder letters are issued or whether the problem persists or recurs after each rectification.

4.11 Although HD stated that there is no evidence indicating any mishandling of reported cases that precluded HD from issuing Notification Slips or Notification Letters on Allotment of Points (see **para. 2.30**), under the mechanism applicable to cases examined by this Office, HD could not determine whether reminder letters were issued excessively or whether PSAs mishandled air-conditioner dripping cases. From an estate management perspective, HD has a responsibility to enforce the Marking Scheme decisively in order to address and prevent air-conditioner dripping problems at an early stage. If some EMOs follow the Marking Scheme diligently (e.g. **Case 4**) while others handle the misdeed inadequately, this may result in unfairness.

4.12 In light of the above, this Office is pleased to note that HD has implemented enhanced measures under the Marking Scheme since December 2024. These include optimising the workflow for handling air-conditioner dripping and standardising the issuance of reminder letters, such as developing a standardised advisory letter template, granting a uniform five-day grace period, and clearly stating that failure to rectify may result in point allotment or even tenancy termination. These measures aim to streamline and strengthen the enforcement work of PSAs. However, there remains room for improvement in monitoring whether PSAs issue advisory letters and report cases in accordance with the guidelines. This Office recommends that HD explore the formulation of measures for monitoring the issuance of advisory letters and case reporting to strengthen its supervision of PSAs.

4.13 This Office recommends that HD explore ways to record the details and follow-up of dripping complaints more systematically to facilitate monitoring. We also note that FEHD’s “CLEARSKY” pilot operation may offer useful insights in terms of inspections and public education. HD is urged to draw on best practices from other government departments (including FEHD) and consider collaborating with them to exchange views on how to conduct systematic analysis, arrange targeted inspections and develop a template for recording air-conditioner dripping cases to facilitate follow-up and monitoring.

(II) HD’S OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES TO BE ENHANCED

4.14 This Office finds HD’s operational guidelines for handling air-conditioner dripping cases rather brief, with only the procedures for enforcing the Marking Scheme. No detailed instructions are given to frontline staff on such aspects as complaint investigation, source detection, air-conditioner testing (including its duration), dealing with uncooperative tenants, and arranging follow-up inspections.

4.15 In our view, without appropriate guidance, frontline staff may handle cases inconsistently. **Case 1** shows that security staff closed the case solely based on the rooftop inspection, which was not quite prudent. Moreover, the EMO failed to effectively deal with the tenant’s repeated refusals for indoor testing, merely repeatedly assigning security staff to conduct rooftop inspections and issuing reminder letters. In **Case 3**, although ground-level observation and indoor testing were attempted, there remained room for improvement in follow-up inspections.

4.16 In cases involving uncooperative tenants, HD stated that estate management staff (including security staff) would, where feasible, employ alternative methods to gather evidence, such as observing from the ground or neighbouring flats. If the source of dripping remains unidentified, they would invoke tenancy agreement clauses to request entry into the suspected flat for inspection and evidence collection. In **Cases 1** and **3**, despite the tenants’ repeated refusals for indoor testing and HD’s inability to confirm dripping from the air-conditioners, HD failed to take effective action to gain access for inspection.

4.17 This Office recommends that HD consider enhancing its operational guidelines for handling air-conditioner dripping cases based on the specific circumstances of PRH estates and its estate management experience, enabling frontline management staff to work in clarity and effectively. The guidelines should cover all stages of the handling process, particularly when external observation fails to identify the dripping source and the suspected tenant is uncooperative. In such cases, they should specify which tenancy clauses may be invoked to request entry for inspection, allowing prompt confirmation of dripping and effective responses to uncooperative tenants. Procedures for source investigation, air-conditioner testing and follow-up inspections should also be included.

(III) REMINDER LETTERS AND ADVISORY LETTERS

4.18 Regarding reminder letters issued by estate management staff in air-conditioner dripping cases, this Office understands that HD adopts an enforcement approach that balances between reasonableness and compassion. However, **Cases 1** and **2** reveal that, despite the source being identified and the dripping issue persisting for months, the EMO only gave verbal advice and issued reminder letters repeatedly. Although these letters clearly stated that the air-conditioner was dripping, the EMO was slow to take enforcement actions under the Marking Scheme, such as issuing a Notification Slip, resulting in prolonged follow-up without resolution. While reminder letters are advisory in nature, Notification Slips are enforcement tools under the Marking Scheme. They serve fundamentally distinct functions. Without proper guidelines on issuing reminder letters, inconsistent treatment may occur.

4.19 Moreover, this Office notes that the reminder letters issued by EMOs under HD and PSAs vary in both content and the specific requirements imposed on tenants.

4.20 This Office is pleased to note that HD introduced enhanced measures under the Marking Scheme in December 2024, including a standardised advisory letter template and a uniform five-day grace period. While HD has improved the mechanism, as advisory letters are issued when the source of dripping is confirmed, we consider further guidelines desirable for handling suspected or uncertain cases.

4.21 This Office recommends that HD draw up operational guidelines and notices in designated format for cases where the source of dripping has not been determined, appealing tenants for taking the initiative to check their dripping air-conditioners and carry out proper maintenance, while reminding them of their responsibilities and the consequences under the Marking Scheme. HD should also consider requiring PSAs to include in their monthly reports the number of advisory letters issued and any repeated cases to facilitate problem detection and follow-up.

(IV) LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD FOR IDENTIFYING DRIPPING AIR-CONDITIONERS

4.22 According to HD, in most complaint cases, enforcement staff are able to enter the flats concerned for inspection or observe from outside the flats. As such, the usual approach is to visually identify the source of dripping with the aid of binoculars (see **para. 2.32**).

4.23 We consider visual observation to be inherently limited by factors such as location, lighting and building height. **Case 3** shows that when a building has multiple sources of dripping, it was difficult to accurately identify the sources solely by ground-level visual observation, even with the aid of binoculars.

4.24 We are pleased to note that in the summer of 2024, HD initiated trials of professional-grade handheld thermal imaging cameras across all PRH estates in rotation

to help estate management staff detect dripping air-conditioners on external walls. A second round of trials is planned for the summer of 2025 to further assess the effectiveness of this technology. Meanwhile, based on frontline feedback, HD will proactively explore adopting more compact and cost-effective professional devices to identify dripping sources.

4.25 We recommend that HD expedite and broaden the adoption of innovative technologies to strengthen its ability to detect dripping air-conditioners.

(V) ENHANCING STAFF TRAINING

4.26 We are pleased to note that since the implementation of enhancement measures under the Marking Scheme in December 2024, HD has updated the relevant operational manual and provided a series of training sessions, including seminars, for frontline staff. To support enforcement by security and building supervisors, HD has also refined the Notification Slip and produced a simplified operational manual to facilitate their discharge of duties. A regular monitoring mechanism has been established at both district and headquarters levels to oversee the performance of PSAs. In addition, the Department plans to launch an instructional video in July 2025 to help security and building supervisors better understand how to effectively carry out enforcement actions under the Marking Scheme. Given the turnover of staff, we recommend that HD continue to strengthen staff training on enforcing the Marking Scheme, particularly on handling air-conditioner dripping, to enhance enforcement efficiency.

(VI) STEPPING UP PUBLICITY AND EDUCATION

4.27 To properly address air-conditioner dripping in PRH estates, undoubtedly HD bears the responsibility to follow up on complaints proactively and take appropriate enforcement actions against non-compliant tenants. However, effective enforcement also relies on tenants' self-discipline and affected residents' cooperation in providing evidence. HD currently reminds tenants through various channels to regularly maintain and repair air-conditioners before and during summer (see **para. 2.35**). We recommend that HD continue to step up publicity and education for PRH residents, particularly emphasising that air-conditioner dripping will incur penalty points and must be promptly rectified upon detection.

4.28 Meanwhile, we note that FEHD launched a pilot operation codenamed "CLEARSKY" in selected districts in the summer of 2024 (see **Appendix, para. 11**). In addition to proactive inspections of air-conditioner dripping blackspots, FEHD also stepped up publicity and education to raise public awareness and sense of responsibility (see **Appendix, para. 12**). We consider these large-scale inspections and outreach initiatives conducive to enhancing enforcement effectiveness and raising public awareness of compliance.

4.29 We recommend that HD consider collaborating with other government departments (such as FEHD) to explore opportunities of conducting large-scale inspections as well as publicity and education campaigns, with a view to increasing public engagement, boosting awareness of proper air-conditioner maintenance, and encouraging affected tenants to help identify the source of dripping.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.30 Overall, we recommend that HD:

- (1) require PSAs to report to HD cases where problems remain unresolved after issuing advisory letters and the Notification Slip (see **para. 4.9**);
- (2) explore the formulation of measures for monitoring the issuance of advisory letters and case reporting to strengthen its supervision of PSAs (see **para. 4.12**);
- (3) explore how to record the details and follow-up of dripping complaints more systematically to facilitate monitoring (see **para. 4.13**);
- (4) consider collaborating with other government departments (such as FEHD) to exchange views on how to conduct systematic analysis and arrange targeted inspections (see **para. 4.13**);
- (5) consider collaboration with other government departments (such as FEHD) to exchange views on the template for recording air-conditioner dripping cases to facilitate follow-up and monitoring (see **para. 4.13**);
- (6) consider enhancing its operational guidelines for handling air-conditioner dripping cases, enabling estate management staff to work in clarity and effectively (see **para. 4.17**);
- (7) beef up the operational guidelines with clear procedures for frontline staff to investigate the source of dripping, including making every effort to enter suspected flats for air-conditioner testing where there is no other way to verify the source of dripping, for example, when the source cannot be determined through external observation, standardising the durations for testing, and specifying follow-up actions when the source remains unidentified (see **para. 4.17**);
- (8) consider stipulating in the operational guidelines that frontline staff must conduct follow-up inspections to ensure dripping air-conditioners are properly repaired (see **para. 4.17**);
- (9) elaborate in the operational guidelines on how to deal with uncooperative tenants effectively and firmly (see **para. 4.17**);

- (10) draw up operational guidelines and notices in designated format for cases where the source of dripping has not been determined (see **para. 4.21**);
- (11) consider requiring PSAs to include in their monthly reports the number of advisory letters issued and any repeated cases to facilitate problem detection and follow-up (see **para. 4.21**);
- (12) expedite and broaden the adoption of innovative technologies to strengthen its ability to detect dripping air-conditioners (see **para. 4.25**);
- (13) continuously strengthen staff training on enforcing the Marking Scheme, particularly on handling air-conditioner dripping cases, to improve enforcement efficiency (see **para. 4.26**);
- (14) continuously step up publicity and education for PRH residents before and during summer, emphasising that air-conditioner dripping will incur penalty points and must be promptly rectified upon detection (see **para. 4.27**); and
- (15) consider collaborating with other government departments (such as FEHD) to explore opportunities of conducting large-scale inspections as well as publicity and education campaigns, with a view to increasing public engagement and boosting awareness of proper air-conditioner maintenance (see **para. 4.29**).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

4.31 The Ombudsman thanks HD and FEHD for their cooperation in the course of this investigation.

Office of The Ombudsman

Ref: DI/481

August 2025

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Appendix

Appendix

FEHD's Handling of Air-Conditioner Dripping Cases

Under section 12(1)(g) of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132, Laws of Hong Kong) (“Ordinance”), if any ventilation system within a premises discharges water, whether waste or otherwise, in such a manner as to be a nuisance, officers of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”) may deal with the nuisance summarily in accordance with the Ordinance.

Investigation Timeline and Procedures

2. FEHD stated that, according to its service pledge, it will initiate an investigation within six working days of receiving a complaint about air-conditioner dripping. If a substantive reply cannot be provided within 10 calendar days, an interim reply will be provided, followed by a substantive reply within 30 calendar days.
3. FEHD’s internal guidelines require staff to conduct site investigations at the reported time of dripping, where practicable. Unless sufficient evidence is obtained during an external inspection to identify the source of dripping, staff must enter the suspected flat and run the air-conditioner for 20 minutes to verify the complaint.

Procedures for Entering Flats and Handling Uncooperative Residents

4. The Public Health and Municipal Services (Amendment) Ordinance 2025 (“Amendment Ordinance”), gazetted on 16 May and effective from 17 August 2025, strengthens the statutory power of FEHD officers to enter premises for investigation. Owners or occupiers who, without reasonable excuse, deny entry within 14 days after the issuance of a Notice of Intended Entry commit an offence and may be liable to a maximum penalty of a fine at level 2 (\$5,000).
5. To handle uncooperative residents, FEHD has established a series of action measures and detailed internal guidelines for frontline staff, specifying each step and timeline for follow-up. A Notice of Appointment is sent to the flat, requiring the occupier to contact FEHD staff. If there is no response, a Notice of Intended Entry is issued, specifying the date and time of the scheduled visit.
6. If no one answers the door during their next visit, FEHD staff will consult the building’s caretaker to assess the occupier’s presence and arrange another visit accordingly. If the occupier ignores the Notice of Intended Entry or refuses entry, staff will issue a Notice of Intention to Apply for Warrant of Entry. If entry is still denied, FEHD will consider applying to the Court for a Warrant of Entry under the Ordinance.

Enforcement Actions

7. According to operational guidelines, if the source of dripping cannot be confirmed during site investigation, FEHD staff will issue an advisory letter urging the owner or occupier of the suspected flat to inspect the air-conditioner promptly. If a particular flat's air-conditioner is confirmed to be the cause, FEHD will issue a Nuisance Notice under the Ordinance, requiring the nuisance to be abated within a specified period¹. Non-compliance may result in prosecution.

System Records

8. FEHD maintains a dedicated record form in its Complaint Management Information System for handling air-conditioner dripping cases. Investigating officers must log the time of dripping and the reason for closing the case. Findings and follow-up actions are also recorded. The form includes fields for complaint details. For example, the options for documenting the time of dripping include "8:00 a.m. to before 6:00 p.m.", "6:00 p.m. to before 2:00 a.m.", "2:00 a.m. to before 8:00 a.m.", and "All day". Follow-up actions include verbal warnings, advisory letters, and Nuisance Notices. Investigating officers must indicate how many times each follow-up action is taken and whether the air-conditioner is tested. If the dates of interim and substantive replies are not entered within the prescribed time frame, the system issues staged reminders and alerts. Geospatial data is also used to log complaint locations, enhancing follow-up efficiency through statistical analysis. This enables targeted outreach and proactive inspections at dripping blackspots before summer.

9. In early 2025, FEHD launched a new Departmental Data Analytics Platform that has significantly improved the handling of air-conditioner dripping complaints. By consolidating complaint data from across Hong Kong, the platform analyses distribution patterns and seasonal trends of dripping blackspots, which are visually displayed on a map. It helps FEHD allocate inspection staff strategically and anticipate potential complaint surges for proactive resource deployment.

Tools for Locating the Source of Dripping

10. FEHD uses tools such as digital cameras, high definition binoculars, and retractable, adjustable video borescope inspection cameras with LED lamps to identify dripping sources. It also employs the Dripping Air Conditioner Investigation System equipped with infrared night-vision recording. This system is particularly effective in low-light conditions or complex environments where the dripping source is distant. As of 2025, the system has been deployed across all districts in Hong Kong.

¹ 3 and 14 days for straightforward and complex cases, respectively.

Proactive Inspections of Buildings with Air-Conditioner Dripping Problems

11. Moving beyond its previous complaint-driven approach, FEHD launched the “CLEARSKY” pilot operation from May to October 2024 in the Eastern, Central and Western, Yau Tsim, Sham Shui Po, Tsuen Wan and Yuen Long districts. Based on the systematic analysis of complaint data, FEHD identified buildings with dripping problems and reallocated manpower to intensify inspections. During the operation, 1,505 Nuisance Notices were issued to flat owners or occupiers, requiring rectification within a specified time frame—over 1.2 times compared to the same period in 2023. The vast majority of the notices were complied with; FEHD will prosecute those who fail to comply.

12. FEHD also enhanced publicity and education across all districts. In collaboration with property services agents and local personalities, it raised public awareness and sense of responsibility regarding air-conditioner dripping through leaflets, posters, banners, TV and radio announcements, advertisements on public transport, online platforms and a thematic webpage. FEHD will evaluate the operation’s effectiveness and consider extending it to other districts.

13. Building on the experience gained in 2024, FEHD reapplied the “CLEARSKY” model from May to September 2025, covering the entire summer season. Targeting blackspots affecting bus stop users, the Department adopted a multipronged strategy, including weekly inspections and coordinated “floor-by-floor” enforcement against multiple flats causing the nuisance. FEHD also partnered with local personalities to strengthen outreach and remind residents to properly maintain their air-conditioners.

Legislative Amendments

14. To enhance enforcement efficiency and deterrence, the Environment and Ecology Bureau introduced the Public Health and Municipal Services (Amendment) Bill 2024 to the Legislative Council in December 2024. After the Bill was passed on 8 May 2025, the Amendment Ordinance was gazetted on 16 May and will take effect on 17 August 2025.

15. As mentioned in paragraph 4, to allow investigating officers timely access to flats suspected of causing nuisance and to address dripping problems effectively, the Amendment Ordinance makes it an offence to ignore a Notice of Intended Entry without reasonable excuse. The maximum penalty is a fine at level 2 (\$5,000). Additionally, permissible entry hours are extended from 7:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m., reflecting current living patterns.

16. The Amendment Ordinance also raises the maximum penalties for non-compliance with Nuisance Notices and Nuisance Orders. For Nuisance Notices, the maximum penalty increases from a fine at level 3 (\$10,000) with a daily fine of \$200 to

a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) with a daily fine of \$450. For Nuisance Orders, it rises from a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) with a daily fine of \$450 to a fine at level 5 (\$50,000) with a daily fine of \$600. These changes aim to expedite the resolution of hygiene-related nuisances.