

**Fourth Meeting of
the Business Facilitation Advisory Committee**

***Agenda Item 6 : Report on the Consultancy Study on
Review of Application and Inspection
of Plumbing Installations in New Buildings***

Purpose

This paper presents the recommendations of the Consultancy Study on Review of Application and Inspection of Plumbing Installations in New Buildings (the Study) and the anticipated benefits, both quantifiable and non-quantifiable, in the processes of design approval and inspection of plumbing installations in new buildings.

Background

2. Under the Waterworks Ordinance, Cap 102, construction of waterworks requires the permission of the Water Supplies Department (WSD) in order to (i) conserve water, (ii) prevent waste, misuse or pollution of the supply, and (iii) ensure that water consumption is properly metered. An applicant should obtain prior approval of the plumbing design before commencement of plumbing installations. Upon completion of the works, WSD has to inspect the plumbing installations before supply of water.

3. In response to the industry's call for measures to speed up the approval process, the Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit commissioned the Study in February 2006. The Study is at its final stage.

Existing Processes

4. The approval of plumbing installations involves the following major steps –

- (a) an applicant submits a plumbing design with technical details and drawings to WSD;
- (b) WSD approves the design, technical details and drawings;

- (c) the contractor reports the commencement of installation to allow on-site work-in-progress inspection by WSD, where necessary;
- (d) the contractor reports the completion of works to WSD after installation;
- (e) WSD inspects and approves the completed installations; and
- (f) if there is any discrepancy between the actual installations and the approved design drawings, the applicant has to apply for amendments to the approved design drawings.

Recommended Improvement Measures

5. Improvement measures were developed after consulting the trade and making reference to overseas practices. The major ones are listed below –

(a) Process improvement

- allow minor amendments of design drawings at WSD's office to save the lead time for re-submission of design applications
- mark up shortcomings of design on submitted drawings to facilitate the applicant's better understanding of requirements and to ensure the quality of re-submission
- after passing the inspection of completed installations, allow minor amendments of the approved design drawings at WSD's office to save the lead time for re-submission of drawings
- defer the submission of certain material catalogues from the design application stage to installation stage

(b) Facilitation of compliance

- print a separate copy of the submission checklist from the "Handbook on Plumbing Installation for Buildings"

for attachment to the application form to reduce incomplete submission

- issue approved design drawings to the applicant to facilitate compliance in the course of installation and subsequent inspections
- update the design requirements contained in the “Handbook on Plumbing Installation for Buildings” and the “Hong Kong Waterworks Standard Requirements” to facilitate preparation of plumbing design up to the required standard, and provide the Chinese version of the Handbook for better understanding of the design requirements
- clearly specify the installation requirements/standards of common items, e.g. backflow prevention devices, to facilitate early compliance
- publish examples of common mistakes identified in plumbing design
- refine the defect list of the inspection report to facilitate more efficient rectification

(c) Enhanced communication

- arrange periodic meetings between WSD and the industry to enhance communication on design requirements and policy matters

Anticipated Benefits

6. It is anticipated that with all the improvement measures put in place, the overall approval time will be reduced by 48%, i.e. from 187 days to 97 days, including time for the processing of re-submitted drawings.

7. Apart from the quantifiable benefits, the recommendations will facilitate a better understanding of the requirements, improve the quality of submissions and provide a formal communication channel to the industry.

Overseas Practices

8. The Consultant has reviewed the regulatory practices in some overseas countries and noticed that self-certification is being adopted in Singapore. The Consultant considers that private certification could be a possible long-term solution when there is such a need and when a consensus of the industry is reached. In addition, a proper audit system for certification, a penalty system to deter fraudulent certification and necessary legislative amendments should be put in place beforehand.

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