



## Promotion of the Wider Voluntary Use of Portable Equipment at Domestic Premises



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## Introduction



The Fire Services Department (“FSD”) attaches great importance to fire safety and protection of life and property in the territory. Prompted by a series of fatal fires in domestic premises that occurred recently in Hong Kong, the Department has been exploring pragmatic and targeted measures to facilitate the occupants of domestic buildings to tackle fire early and prevent a small fire from turning into an uncontrolled blaze. At the same time, FSD has also been making efforts to educate members of the public on the proper use and maintenance of fire service installations or equipment (“FSI/E”), and heighten their awareness of fire protection through public education in a bid to reduce fire risks. With a view to enhancing home fire safety, FSD is of the view that promoting the use of portable equipment, which is a kind of FSI/E, such as fire extinguishers and fire blankets, in domestic premises on a voluntary basis would be a simple and practical way to extend fire protection coverage at homes.



## Background



### Overall fire protection strategy

2. It has been FSD's mission to formulate fire safety policy for better protection of life and property in the territory. In recent years, FSD has adopted a human-oriented approach in formulating fire protection strategy and attaches great importance to strengthening the capabilities of the public in dealing with fires or emergencies before the attendance of fire-fighting or ambulance crews. In this regard, FSD has been promoting the "Three Basic Skills on Emergency Preparedness", namely "Extinguish and Prevent Fire", "Escape and Evacuate" and "Self-help and Help Others".



### Targeted fire protection measures for domestic premises

3. According to an analysis on local building fires claiming 81 lives in Hong Kong from 2017 to 2021, about 90% of these building fires occurred in domestic premises. This calls for more targeted fire protection measures for domestic premises to facilitate the occupants to respond to a fire using the skills of "Escape and Evacuate" and "Extinguish and Prevent Fire".

4. Early detection of fire and an early warning to building occupants for timely evacuation are of paramount importance to save their lives in case of a fire. For targeted measure to facilitate occupants of domestic premises to "Escape and Evacuate" in case of fire, FSD has been promoting for a wider voluntary use of stand-alone fire detectors ("SFD") in all premises in Hong Kong (particularly domestic premises)<sup>1</sup>. SFD is a self-contained battery-operated device that incorporates a fire detector and an alarm, serving the purpose of detecting a fire and giving audible alarm warning or other form of warning to building occupants during the incipient stage of fire. With prompt notification, occupants can have more time for evacuation before the escape route becomes impassable due to smoke and heat.

<sup>1</sup> The Fire Service (Installations and Equipment) Regulations ("FS(IE)R") was amended in 2021 to the effect that owners/occupants of any buildings/premises will not be required to engage registered fire service installation contractors ("RFSICs") for the installation, maintenance, inspection or repair of any SFD which are installed of the owners/occupants' own volition. Besides, owners and occupants will also be exempted from the statutory duty of keeping SFD in efficient working order at all times and having them inspected by RFSICs at least once in every 12 months.

5. On the part of “Extinguish and Prevent Fire”, FSD has been educating members of the public to operate FSI/E, such as fire hydrant/hose reel system, fire extinguishers and fire blankets, under safe condition. However, such FSI/E are generally not present within a domestic premises<sup>2</sup> and occupants may resort to FSI/E installed at building common area when fire breaks out. As a matter of fact, devastating fatal fires could be better prevented if the occupants are able to put out the fire early once it is detected. In view of this, FSD sees the need to formulate a targeted measure to facilitate occupants of domestic premises to “Extinguish and Prevent Fire” as early as possible.



6. In this light, FSD has conducted a review on local building fires in which portable equipment have been used by members of the public to tackle the fire from 2017 to 2021. The findings indicated that more than 80% of these building fires were generally extinguished prior to fire service attendance, showing that portable equipment is an effective means for the public to extinguish fires if they could be readily used, in tandem with the skill of “Extinguish Fire”. Based on the above findings, FSD is of the view that the target mentioned in paragraph 5 could be achieved by installation of portable equipment for immediate use at home.

<sup>2</sup> FSI/E are installed, as required by FSD’s Code of Practice for Minimum Fire Service Installations and Equipment (“CoP”), in the building common area but not within the individual domestic premises therein (exceptions are units with open kitchen constructed according to approved building plans, which should have been fitted with FSI/E specified in relevant codes of practice, including smoke detector(s) with a sounder base and sprinkler heads covering the notional open kitchen area).

## The Extant Regulatory Control on Portable Equipment

7. Portable equipment is defined in regulation 2 of FS(IE)R as any fire service equipment which is manufactured, used or designed to be used as an independent unit for the purposes of extinguishing, attacking, preventing or limiting a fire. They are handy, easy to operate and very effective on putting out small fires. Examples of portable equipment are fire extinguishers and fire blankets. A fire extinguisher consists of a pressurized cylinder containing an extinguishing agent (e.g. water, dry chemical, carbon dioxide, etc.) that can be discharged to extinguish or control fire. On the other hand, a fire blanket, which is a flexible sheet made of fire-resistant material (e.g. glass fibre), is very useful for putting out small fires caused by say burning oil in kitchen by placing it over the fire.

### FSD's Approval mechanism on portable equipment

8. To safeguard product performance and safety, all portable equipment shall be approved by the Director of Fire Services (“D of FS”) before sale or supply in Hong Kong under regulation 3 of FS(IE)R. FSD has put in place an approval mechanism to examine the performance and safety aspects of the portable equipment when considering whether to grant the approval. Under the existing approval mechanism<sup>3</sup>, FSD would vet the test reports<sup>4</sup>, product catalogue, technical details, etc. of the portable equipment to ensure its performance and construction<sup>5</sup> are in conformity with all relevant local requirements and national/international standards. Pursuant to regulation 4 of FS(IE)R, a list of approved portable equipment (“the list”) shall be kept by D of FS and published in the government Gazette at least once in every year for public reference.



<sup>3</sup> Details of the approval mechanism is set out in the Guidance for Application for Approval of Portable Equipment ([https://www.hkfsd.gov.hk/eng/source/licensing/Guidance\\_Approval\\_PE\\_Acceptance\\_FSIE\\_FSP\\_eng.pdf](https://www.hkfsd.gov.hk/eng/source/licensing/Guidance_Approval_PE_Acceptance_FSIE_FSP_eng.pdf)).

<sup>4</sup> The test reports shall be issued by local, Mainland or overseas testing laboratories accredited to perform such tests, which must hold certificate specifying the scopes of accreditation granted by one of the accreditation bodies which have signed Mutual Recognition Agreements with the Hong Kong Accreditation Service.

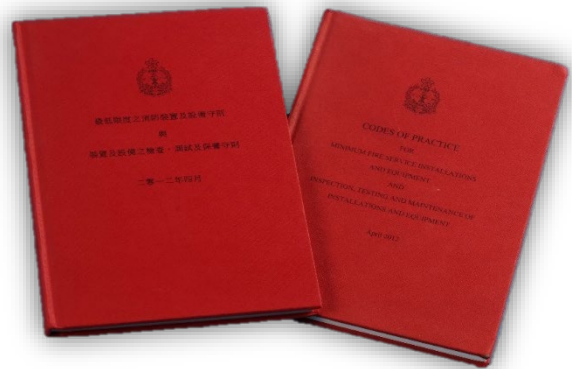
<sup>5</sup> There are sections specifying the requirement on performance and construction of portable equipment in different national/international standards, i.e. fire performance, burst test, hydraulic test, impact test, etc.

9. In accordance with regulations 6 and 7 of FS(IE)R, FSI/E shall be installed, maintained, repaired and inspected by a RFSIC. These two regulations are not applicable to any portable equipment which is not required by or pursuant to law to be installed in any premises.

10. Regulation 8(1) of FS(IE)R stipulates that owners of FSI/E including all portable equipment being mandatorily or voluntarily provided, shall keep the equipment in efficient working order at all times and have such equipment inspected by a RFSIC at least once in every 12 months. The above statutory obligations, and the cost involved in engaging RFSICs for fulfilling those statutory requirements, which may not be proportionate to the price of portable equipment, may be reasons lowering the public's initiative to install portable equipment at domestic premises on their own volition.

## Provision of Portable Equipment in buildings and premises

11. Provision of FSI/E including portable equipment is a mandatory requirement for various buildings and premises. Under section 16 of the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123), minimum FSI/E shall be provided in accordance with the CoP, where FSI/E including portable equipment might be installed in common area in various buildings. For premises which are required to obtain a license or registration under different legislations, portable equipment may be installed in compliance with the respective license requirements or fire safety requirements formulated by FSD<sup>6</sup>.



12. As mentioned in paragraph 5 above, FSI/E are generally not present within a domestic premises. Promoting the wider voluntary use of portable equipment in domestic premises would be a simple and practical way to enhance home fire safety.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, under section 12 of the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279), regulation 33B of the Food Business Regulation (Cap. 132X), regulation 5 of the Places of Amusement Regulation (Cap. 132BA), etc., upon referral of applications for licensed/registered premises from the relevant licensing authorities, FSD will formulate fire safety requirements, including installing certain FSI/E including portable equipment, for compliance. Under Section 12K of the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance (Cap. 349), hotels and guesthouses are required to comply with a series of license requirements, including the provision of certain FSI/E including portable equipment.



## Way Forward – Promotion of a Wider Voluntary Use of Portable Equipment at Domestic Premises

13. As portable equipment installed at home are free from external interference, under better housekeeping and less susceptible to deterioration by humidity, dust and human activities, they could generally be maintained in better conditions over years. Therefore, it is safe and prudent for ordinary citizens to keep and self-maintain an approved portable equipment at their domestic premises. Having regard to the effectiveness of portable equipment in putting out fire during its incipient stage, as well as the negligible risk for keeping a portable equipment inside a domestic premises to the occupants thereat, the promotion of a wider use of portable equipment on the public's own volition in domestic premises could effectively extend fire protection coverage to citizens' homes.

14. As way forward, FSD plans to encourage voluntary use of approved portable equipment in domestic premises by way of legislative amendment, so that, upon legislative amendment, owners of such portable equipment shall be free from the statutory duty of keeping it in efficient working order at all times and having it inspected by a RFSIC at least once every 12 months.<sup>7, 8</sup> The statutory requirements for all mandatorily installed portable equipment shall remain status quo, as such installation is pursuant to other ordinances/regulations or licensing requirements/fire safety requirements under those ordinances/regulations.

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<sup>7</sup> For avoidance of doubt, the proposed exemptions are applicable to portable equipment on the list of approved equipment approved by D of FS and as published in the Gazette pursuant to regulation 4 of FS(IE)R.

<sup>8</sup> The proposed exemptions will not be applicable to those portable equipment installed voluntarily at non-domestic premises even if they are used for residential purposes and constituting a separate household unit, because the fire safety requirements of those non-domestic premises are subject to other legislation governing their respective licensing requirements. Besides, FSI/E including portable equipment installed voluntarily at the common area of domestic building, such as common corridors, lobbies, staircases, etc., will not be exempted, as they generally deteriorate faster than those installed in domestic premises and may be used by any passer-by for fire-fighting purpose.

15. For the purpose of promoting the wider voluntary use of portable equipment at homes, FSD will conduct promotional activities to explain to the public the benefits and the use of portable equipment through different channels. FSD will also educate the public on how to select and how to purchase approved portable equipment, suitable placement of portable equipment at suitable locations, how to use a portable equipment in case of fire as well as self-checking/inspection and maintenance of portable equipment.

## Enquiry

16. Should you require further information or amplification, please feel free to contact Policy Division of Licensing and Certification Command of Fire Services Department by email: [domestic\\_portable\\_e@hkfsd.gov.hk](mailto:domestic_portable_e@hkfsd.gov.hk) or by fax at 2723 2197 on or before 31.3.2023.

## Fire Services Department

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