

# Report No. 42 of the Director of Audit — Chapter 6

## MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF FIRE-FIGHTING AND RESCUE VEHICLES

### Summary

1. In October 2003, the Fire Services Department (FSD) operated 819 vehicles comprising 353 fire-fighting and rescue vehicles maintained in-house by its Workshops and Transport Division (WTD), and 466 ambulances and other support vehicles maintained by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) under two Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

#### **Maintenance service provided by the Workshops and Transport Division**

2. *Workload and performance targets of the workshops.* The WTD operates three workshops for the maintenance of the fire-fighting and rescue vehicles. The Audit Commission (Audit) noted that the disciplined services staff of the workshops were not required to keep time records of the time available for maintenance jobs and the time charged to maintenance jobs. Audit also noted that the FSD only set targets for the availability of all its fire-fighting and rescue vehicles. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should maintain time records for the utilisation of the disciplined services staff of the WTD and set targets for the turnaround time of all the fire-fighting and rescue vehicles maintained by the workshops.*

3. *Disciplined services maintenance staff.* Unlike EMSD servicing stations, FSD workshops have been manned by disciplined services maintenance staff since 1947. The FSD's justification is that they are required to attend to the scenes of fire alarms of No. 3 and above to repair front-line fire-fighting vehicles on the spot. However, in practice, only fitters and electricians are required to attend to the scenes of fire alarms of No. 3 and above. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should critically assess the feasibility, and the costs and benefits of employing civilian staff to replace the existing disciplined services staff in the workshops, with the exception of fitters and electricians.*

4. *Availability of maintenance service from authorised local agents.* According to the Head of the WTD, maintenance service might be available from manufacturers' authorised local agents for all the chassis and some of the fixed and portable fire-fighting equipment of the fire-fighting and rescue vehicles maintained by FSD workshops. The possibility of obtaining maintenance service from local agents provides a good opportunity for the FSD to review the suitability and cost-effectiveness of the present practice of maintaining its fire-fighting and rescue vehicles in-house. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should explore the feasibility of outsourcing the maintenance service for the chassis, and the fixed and portable fire-fighting equipment of the fire-fighting and rescue vehicles in the long run.*

**Maintenance service provided by  
the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department**

5. ***Absence of review on the cost-effectiveness of EMSD maintenance service.*** From August 1999, government departments were gradually untied from the service of the EMSD. According to Financial Circular No. 6/2001, a Controlling Officer can choose to enter into an SLA with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Trading Fund (EMSTF) without recourse to competitive bidding if he is satisfied that the trading fund is fully capable of delivering specific service in a cost-effective manner. Audit noted that the FSD had not conducted any review on the cost-effectiveness of EMSD maintenance service before entering into two SLAs with the EMSTF. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should review the cost-effectiveness of the vehicle maintenance service provided by the EMSD.*

6. ***Outsourcing of vehicle maintenance service.*** In October 2003, among the 466 vehicles maintained by the EMSD, 448 vehicles were supplied by 11 manufacturers with local agents which also provided vehicle maintenance service to other government departments. Audit noted that in 2002, three government departments had awarded three vehicle maintenance service contracts to private sector service providers after competitive bidding. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should consider a phased outsourcing of the maintenance service of the 448 ambulances and other support vehicles through competitive bidding.*

**Stocks of spare parts for fire-fighting and rescue vehicles**

7. ***Absence of a common inventory database.*** A computerised stock control system was installed in each of the three FSD storehouses for controlling and accounting the stocks of spare parts for the fire-fighting and rescue vehicles. Due to system limitation, the information stored in the computer system of individual storehouses was not linked up to form a common inventory database. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should develop a common inventory database under a centralised stock control system.*

8. ***Stock-out situation.*** The FSD has set stock reorder levels and minimum stock levels for individual stock items to prevent a stock-out situation. However, the stock reorder levels and the minimum stock levels were not strictly adhered to for determining the replenishment of the stock items. As at 31 August 2003, the balances of 5,898 stock items with a total value of \$3.6 million were below their reorder levels and the balances of 5,592 stock items were below their minimum stock levels. Due to the lack of spare parts, 46 repair and maintenance jobs of the FSD were delayed, on average, by 26 days in 2002. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should regularly review and revise the stock reorder levels and the minimum stock levels to ensure that the stocks of spare parts are kept at an optimum level.*

9. ***Stock discrepancies and dormant stock.*** Audit noted that the stock records had not been kept properly and the surprise stock checks had been carried out by the FSD at intervals longer than the three-month interval specified in the Stores and Procurement Regulations. As at 31 August 2003, 4,261 stock items with a total value of \$3.63 million

had been kept in the storehouses for more than 10 years without stock movement. Out of these dormant stock items, the FSD had identified that 237 stock items with a total value of \$115,240 were obsolete and unserviceable. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should investigate the discrepancies between the stock record balances and the physical stock balances, review the stock checks and loan recording procedures, and promulgate procedures to ensure that management information on dormant stock items is reviewed and that follow-up action is taken by the storehouse management.*

### **Traffic accidents involving fire-fighting and rescue vehicles**

10. ***Traffic Accident Inquiry Board.*** From 2000 to 2002, six Traffic Accident Inquiry Boards (TAIBs) were set up to investigate six traffic accidents involving fire-fighting and rescue vehicles. In one case, the TAIB recommended that a surcharge should be levied on the FSD user-driver who was considered at fault. However, the TAIB concluded that disciplinary action should not be instituted against the user-driver due to the lack of substantial evidence to prove that he was speeding. Audit found that two members of each TAIB (other than a Driving Instructor and a Workshop Officer) had been selected from the senior officers of the same divisions or even the same fire stations of the user-drivers involved in the accidents. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should issue guidelines to the TAIB on the circumstances under which expert evidence and advice on technical issues should be sought, and select its members (other than the Driving Instructor and the Workshop Officer) from senior officers of other FSD divisions.*

11. ***Surcharge of user-drivers involved in traffic accidents.*** According to the Fire Services Department General Orders, a surcharge may be levied on a staff for damage caused to any departmental vehicle or property, and the degree of blame is the prime factor in determining the levy of surcharge. Audit found that from 2000 to 2002, out of 277 FSD user-drivers surcharged by the FSD, only 54 were classified as blameworthy. On the other hand, 12 user-drivers convicted of careless driving were not surcharged by the FSD. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should issue clear guidelines for determining the blameworthiness and levying of surcharge on the FSD user-drivers involved in traffic accidents.*

12. ***Remedial driving training.*** From 2000 to 2002, 18 FSD user-drivers involved in more than one traffic accident were classified as blameworthy. However, only one user-driver was required to attend remedial driving training. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Fire Services should require the FSD user-drivers who are responsible for the traffic accidents to attend remedial driving training to improve their driving skills.*

### **Response from the Administration**

13. The Administration agrees with all the audit recommendations.

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