

\$95 mil package to better rescue facilities

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THE time it takes for rescue crews to reach an emergency will be reduced by an average of 30 seconds when a \$95-million package for improving the communications system of the Fire Services Department is completed three years later.

The package was approved by the Finance Committee yesterday.

The new facilities will enable Hongkong to be equipped with the world's most advanced mobilising system by the end of this decade.

The current procedures for dispatching rescue teams are operated mainly on a manual basis and the present seven-year-old mobilising system will reach its maximum capacity by 1990.

It will be replaced by a Second Generation Mobilising System (SGMS) with integrated computer and telecommunications facilities.

Senior Divisional Officer (Mobilisation and Communications Centre) Hsu King-ping said it took various departments four years to draft the package and it was expected to take another three years before the new system could come into service.

"We now need about 90 seconds to have a fire engine or an ambulance sent out after we have received an emergency call. The time will be shortened to one minute with the new system, and our officers should then be able to reach an emergency within six minutes in the urban areas," said Mr Hsu.

He explained that reaching the scene half a minute earlier would be critical in terms of fire-fighting, as it is easier to contain a fire from spreading at the early stage of an outbreak.

The SGMS will also lead to more economical and efficient deployment of resources.

"The computer system can provide us with vital information such as what is stored in a particular warehouse, and its fire-fighting facilities. It can further help us to decide how many and which fire engines should be sent out, as well as what is the shortest route to take to go to the emergency," said Mr Hsu.

Another \$18 million was allotted to upgrade the appliances of the Tai Po (East), Junk Bay and Kotewall Road fire stations.

In addition to the Fire Services Department's package is a separate \$7 million ground-based radio direction-finding system for the Post Office for use in search and rescue operations.

The records of the Independent Commission Against Corruption's Operations Registry and Intelligence Unit will also be computerised.

The ICAC transactions are growing at about 10 per cent a year, and the numbers in its card indices have been increased from 151,800 in 1981 to 247,400 last year.

Other items approved by the Finance Committee yesterday included a \$113 million grant for the Medical School of the Chinese University and a sum of \$13.5 million from the Lotteries Fund to the New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association.

The councillors also agreed on a \$29-million commitment for buying medical equipment.