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Ambulance abuse claim is rejected

A CLAIM that Hong-kong's Ambulance Service is being regularly abused by the public was rejected by the Government yesterday.

Assistant Chief Ambulance Officer Mr Andrew Pang said an allegation by the Fire Services Department Ambulancemen's Union of 146 cases of abuse last year was without foundation.

"There were only 13 reported cases of abuse in the past five years out of more than 1.65 million reports," Mr Pang said.

Only three of the 13 were proved to be genuine cases of abuse, he said.

Chairman of the Union Mr Lee Wing-hong said on Saturday that under existing laws a person could call an ambulance and go where he liked at any time. Unless the current legislation was reviewed, he added, misuse would continue to waste valuable resources.

Mr Pang said: "According to our figures, their claim that there were 146 cases of abuse cannot be substantiated. We have a complete set of forms for the ambulance supervisors to fill in.

"They make a report if there is any case which they consider is misuse or abuse of ambulance services. According to our official records, there have been only 13 cases since 1981, when the forms were introduced."

Mr Pang admitted that it was possible that some cases of the ambulance service being abused had not been reported.

In addition, it was difficult to lay down a definition of whether or not a case was abuse. A person who felt ill only momentarily might have the same symptoms as a serious or fatal case and a driver could not query the call for an ambulance, he said.

Representatives from the ambulancemen's union were granted permission last year to check the journey sheets at ambulance depots by Deputy Director of Fire Services Mr John March.

Union members found 146 cases of abuse including cases where "patients" requested transport from private residences to the airport, hotels or even railway stations.