

Searching the ashes for answers

One week after its worst fire in decades, Hong Kong is searching for answers to the inferno that ripped through seven towers at Wang Fuk Court housing complex in Tai Po, killing at least 156 people, injuring dozens and leaving around 30 still unaccounted for.

By Victor Sanjinez, Davies Christian, Jeffie Lam, Andrew London, Kaliz Lee, Lau Ka-kuen, Joe Lo, Henry Wong

“ I can’t describe the feeling ... There are so many [photos] of children.

A woman surnamed Cheung, who searched for her sister and brother-in-law from Wang Cheong House

Kwong Fuk Community Hall

Photos of the deceased and personal belongings have been displayed at the community hall, drawing scores of people who returned repeatedly in attempts to identify their missing family members and friends.

A sea of flowers

Thousands of mourners have visited a makeshift memorial near the estate to lay flowers and leave handwritten messages and toys for the children who were lost in the tragedy.

The queue stretches about 2km to Tai Wo

Relief funds

Support Fund for Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po:

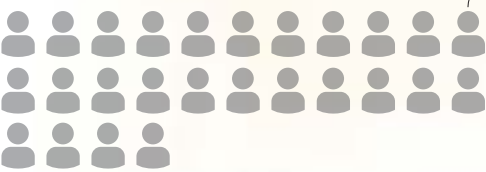
HK\$2.3 billion

Government
HK\$300 million

Public donations
HK\$2 billion

Shelters for residents

More than 2,620 residents displaced by the fire have been moved into temporary accommodation as of Tuesday, including youth hostels, hotels and transitional housing units.



Arrests

Arrests by Hong Kong’s anti-graft body over alleged corruption

12

Arrests by police on suspicion of manslaughter

15

Pet casualties and rescues

Pets rescued:

209

Pets dead:

61

Cats: 34

Dogs: 12

Birds: 8

Turtles: 7



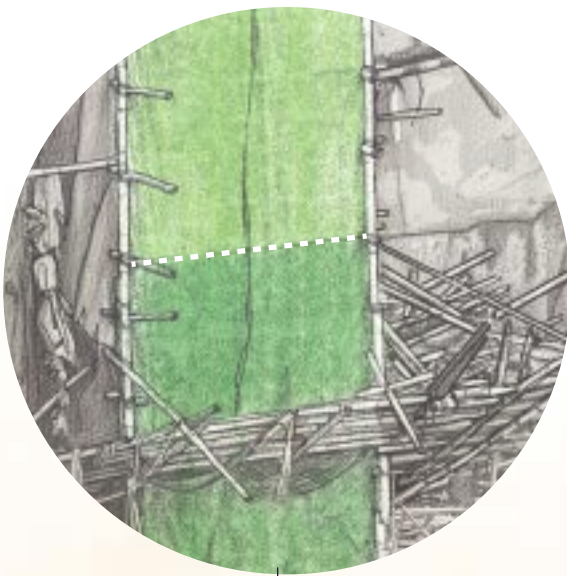
Bamboo scaffolding

Raging fires destroyed bamboo structures, sending flaming debris crashing to the ground, which blocked entrances and hampered firefighters.



Polystyrene foam

Flammable polystyrene foam, installed by contractors to seal windows, caused the fire to spread rapidly upwards, from outside to inside the blocks.



Mesh netting

All eight blocks had been under renovations since last year. Authorities have said that following typhoon damage in July, contractors installed cheaper, non-fire-resistant mesh, mixing it with approved materials to deceive inspectors.

Wang Chi House Block H

Wang Chi House (Block H) is the only tower of the estate’s eight buildings that was relatively unaffected by the blaze.

Bodies in stairwells, on rooftops

Recovery teams have found bodies and charred remains in multiple locations, including rooftops, inside flats and in corridors and stairwells. Most victims were in Wang Cheong House.

1 Fire spreads

The fire spread rapidly to adjacent blocks, ultimately engulfing seven towers.

2 Fire alarms

Fire alarms failed to sound in all eight buildings, significantly delaying the evacuations. A survivor who lived on the second floor of Wang Cheong House - the block that first caught fire - said the blaze escalated quickly.

1 Fire first reported

The fire was first detected among renovation materials near the lower level.

“ I live alone and no one will rent any flat to me, really, and I cannot afford to buy another one.

Retired taxi driver surnamed Lee, about his future living situation in Wang Chi House

“ I have been crying during my stay in hospital after knowing many of my neighbours are still missing. Some of them have watched me grow.

William Li, 40, who was rescued from the second floor of Wang Cheong House

Firefighter fatality

Firefighter Ho Wai-ho, 37, who was among the first crews to arrive at the scene, died soon after the blaze erupted. He initially lost contact with his team and was later found at Wang Cheong House ground floor with burns.

More on the Tai Po fire tragedy

