

LCQ6: Disposable plastic tableware

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 9):

Question:

The results of a study have shown that the disposable plastic food containers used by quite a number of fast food chains would have an overall migration exceeding the limit resulting in food contamination when they were used to hold food with temperatures of over 100 degrees Celsius. On the other hand, the results of a sampling test on local wild flathead grey mullets have shown that 60 per cent of the samples contained plastic fragments, the constituents of which are commonly used in the making of disposable plastic tableware. Some green groups have pointed out that the persistent organic pollutants (POPs) adhered to microplastics can cause cancer after entering the human body via the food chain. In addition, the governments of France and Taiwan have decided to ban the use of disposable plastic tableware in 2020 and 2030 respectively. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied and assessed, among the new confirmed cases of cancers in the past three years, the percentages of those which were related to POPs;

(2) whether it has investigated (i) restaurants' use of disposable plastic food containers which have an overall migration exceeding the limit when coming into contact with high temperatures, and (ii) restaurants' massive use of disposable plastic food containers;

(3) whether it formulated policies and measures in the past three years to encourage school lunch box suppliers as well as operators of restaurant chains and canteens in government office buildings to give greater consideration from the perspectives of reducing microplastics entering the food chain, protecting the environment and safeguarding public health, and switch to the use of reusable food containers or plastic-free disposable food containers;

(4) whether it formulated policies and measures in the past three years to (i) change the restaurants' undesirable practice of massively using disposable plastic food containers, and (ii) develop among members of the public a habit from childhood to bring their own tableware and avoid using disposable plastic food containers; and

(5) in view of the results of a study by an American university which showed that more than 90 per cent of the samples of bottled water contained microplastic particles which can cause cancer, whether the Government will (i) step up its efforts to persuade members of the public to purchase less bottled water and to switch to bringing their own water bottles and using the

drinking fountains provided in public places instead, and (ii) install in places with high pedestrian flow higher-grade drinking fountains (such as those adopting medical-grade and reverse osmosis filtration technologies) so as to provide members of the public with drinking water that meets high water quality standards?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), the Education Bureau, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the Department of Health (DH), the Government Property Agency (GPA) and the Hospital Authority (HA), our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Paul Tse is as follows:

(1) According to the DH, cancer is generally multifactorial and some common causes include ageing, unhealthy lifestyle, genetic and environmental factors, etc. As for the impact of microplastics on the ecological environment, it is an emerging topic of global concern and scientists worldwide are still exploring and studying the issue. The FHB has not commissioned any studies on this specific topic. Neither does the HA keep any statistics on the relation between new cancer cases and plastic pollution. On the other hand, while scientists have yet to fully understand the impacts of microplastics on human health including its carcinogenicity, the international understanding is that precautionary measures should be put in place as early as possible to reduce plastics entering the environment.

(2) No study has been carried out by the Government on restaurants' provision of plastic food containers to customers. That said, the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) has sponsored a green group to conduct a survey in 2018-19 on the provision of plastic containers and tableware by specific restaurants to customers. The project is underway and estimated for completion in October 2018.

(3) and (4) The Government has been striving to promote green lunch in schools. The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) holds talks for schools and provides them with practical guidelines and circulars, and advises lunch suppliers to use washable and reusable food containers instead of disposable ones. Under the Food Wise Hong Kong Campaign, the EPD has also issued the Food Waste Reduction Good Practice Guide for Educational Sector, encouraging schools to, inter alia, facilitate students to bring and use reusable tableware, containers and water bottles, thereby reducing the use of disposable plastic food containers and tableware. To further nurture the habit of waste reduction at source among students, the EPD has implemented the On-site Meal Portioning Funding (OMPF) Scheme since 2009, under which the ECF has earmarked \$150 million to subsidise schools to conduct basic conversion works and install facilities necessary for implementing on-site meal portioning on campus, thereby promoting the "food wise" culture, as well as reducing food waste and the use of disposable plastic food containers and tableware. So far, over 120 schools have been subsidised to run OMPF projects.

On the other hand, the EPD is committed to facilitating the general public and different sectors of the community to reduce the use of disposable food containers and plastic tableware. For example, the EPD engages the catering sector from time to time to encourage restaurants to phase in green measures, such as providing dine-in customers with only reusable food containers and tableware, avoiding the use of styrofoam food containers for take-away food and welcoming customers to bring their own food containers for take-away food. Under the Sustainable Development Fund, the Government has also earlier supported the food and beverage sector to formulate guidelines on green procurement by the trade, with the aim of encouraging various types of restaurants and eateries to practise green procurement, including the use of recyclable or plant-fibre tableware instead of disposable plastic ones to help reduce plastic pollution. Furthermore, under the Hong Kong Awards for Environmental Excellence and the Hong Kong Green Organisation Certification, the EPD appeals to food and beverage caterers to take measures to encourage customers not to ask for disposable tableware and food containers. The ECF also subsidises local non-profit-making organisations run various projects to promote less use of disposable tableware and food containers in the community, thereby inspiring citizens and students to use reusable tableware and food containers.

At present, the tenancies entered into by the GPA for government departments with operators of canteens in government properties would also generally prescribe that the operator shall use decomposable lunch boxes for take-away services.

The Government will continue to take the lead in adopting a green procurement policy, such as avoiding the use of single-use disposable items (including tableware and food containers) and purchasing products with improved recyclability, higher recycled contents, less packaging and greater durability as far as practicable.

In addition, the Government strives to take forward the implementation of relevant policies and regulations in order to rise up to the challenge of waste management. It is expected that the future implementation of municipal solid waste charging scheme could effectively, through economic incentives, drive behavioural change to reduce waste generation, thereby reducing the overall waste disposal quantity.

(5) To create a social environment where the public is encouraged to cultivate the habit of bringing their own reusable water bottles with a view to promoting waste reduction at source, the Government has required all policy bureaux and departments to gradually cease the sale of water in plastic bottles (measuring 1 litre or less) through automatic vending machines at government venues under their purview (e.g. sports complexes, performance venues, government offices, parks, country parks, government car parks, public transport interchanges or ferry piers). The arrangement took effect on February 20, 2018 and is applicable to relevant contracts, tenancies/tenancy agreements or permits tendered on or after that date. As for existing automatic beverage vending machines at such premises, the policy bureaux and departments will discuss with the suppliers/operators concerned and ask them to voluntarily implement the new arrangement of ceased sale as

early as possible.

The AFCD promotes waste reduction and a responsible attitude towards the environment through the "Take Your Litter Home" public education programme. Members of the public are encouraged to plan ahead before visiting the country parks, such as to bring along reusable water bottles and food containers so as to avoid and reduce the generation of waste, and take away their waste after visiting the country parks. In addition, the AFCD has launched the "Bring Your Own Water Bottle" Reward Scheme since 2014 to encourage country park visitors to reduce waste at source and avoid consumption of one-off bottled drinks. Country park visitors who have brought along their reusable water bottles will be given stamps for redemption of souvenirs as reward.

Meanwhile, the EPD is co-ordinating with various policy bureaux and departments to install additional water dispensers as necessary at new government venues and suitable existing government venues when conducting renovation works, subject to actual circumstances and technical feasibility. Water quality and hygiene of such dispensers will be maintained in accordance with relevant guidelines by the various policy bureaux and departments.

In addition, in December 2017, the EPD launched a Waste Reduction Guidebook for Large Scale Event Organisers (Guidebook), which provides clear information and practical examples to assist event organisers and participants in achieving waste reduction at source. The Guidebook recommends, among other things, that organisers set up on-site water refilling stations at the event venues and encourage participants to bring their own bottles. We also encourage government departments to set a role model by making reference to the Guidebook and implementing the recommended measures therein as far as practicable.

LCQ2: Vetting and approval of plans submitted in respect of building works of modular housing/container housing

Following is a question by the Hon Jeremy Tam and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (May 9):

Question:

Section 16 of the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) provides that if plans of building works submitted to the Building Authority (BA) (i.e. the Director of Buildings) are not endorsed with or accompanied by a certificate from the

Director of Fire Services (DFS) certifying that (i) no fire service installation or equipment is necessary in connection with the building that will result from the carrying out of the building works shown on the plans or (ii) in the opinion of DFS, the fire service installations and equipment shown on the plans have met the minimum requirements, BA may refuse to give his approval of the plans. It has been reported that the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) is planning to build three modular housing blocks of three storeys each at 202-220 Nam Cheong Street, Sham Shui Po for temporary residential purpose (HKCSS modular housing). Regarding the issues relating to the issuance by DFS of the aforesaid certificate for the building works of modular housing/container housing and the vetting and approval by BA of plans submitted in respect of such kind of works, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) (i) of the criteria adopted by DFS for determining whether the aforesaid certificate should be issued for the building works of HKCSS modular housing, and (ii) whether DFS has issued the certificate;

(2) of the criteria adopted by BA for determining whether approval should be given to the plans submitted in respect of the building works of HKCSS modular housing; the number of times for which BA has so far received the relevant plans submitted by HKCSS, and on each occasion, (i) the date of receipt of such plans and (ii) the amount of fees charged; whether BA has approved the relevant plans; if so, of the approval date;

(3) of the details of the applications for constructing temporary modular housing/container housing received by BA and DFS in the past five years, including (i) the dates of application, (ii) the locations of the modular housing/container housing concerned, (iii) the amounts of fees payable by the applicants, (iv) the number of revisions made to the plans and (v) the outcome of vetting and approval (set out in a table); (vi) the number of applications received and (vii) the number of applications approved by BA and DFS in each of the past five years, as well as (viii) the amount of fees charged, (ix) the amount of processing time and (x) the number of revisions made to the plans, per application on average; and

(4) regarding each of the cases in which the plans submitted in the past five years to BA for approval which were subsequently rejected, of the proposed location(s) of the modular housing/container housing concerned and the justifications of BA for not granting approval?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Jeremy Tam is as follows:

For building plan applications submitted by an Authorised Person (AP) in accordance with the Buildings Ordinance (BO), regardless of the proposed construction method (including the Modular Integrated Construction (MiC) technology), the Buildings Department (BD) must process the building plans in

accordance with the BO and its subsidiary legislation. The BD's officers will scrutinise whether the planning, design and construction of the building and its building works shown on the building plans comply with the statutory requirements and will also refer the building plans to other relevant departments through the centralised processing system for their assessments on areas of concern or requirements under their purview. Other than the conditions or grounds listed under section 16 of the BO that the Buildings Authority (BA) may refuse to give his approval of any plans of building works, BA must approve the building plan submission.

MiC technology refers to a construction method whereby free-standing integrated modules (completed with finishes, fixtures and fittings) are manufactured in a prefabrication factory and then transported to site for installation into a building. To provide clearer and more specific guidance on the use of MiC technology to the industry, the BD has promulgated a practice note in December 2017, setting out general guidance on design requirements for compliance with BO and relevant factors to be considered for projects using MiC technology. The relevant practice note can be found at the following link: www.bd.gov.hk/english/documents/pnap/ADV/ADV036.pdf

Regarding the development proposal at 202-220 Nam Cheong Street at Sham Shui Po, the concerned building plans were submitted to the BD on December 6, 2017 and were approved by the BA in accordance with BO on February 2, 2018. Nevertheless, the BD has not received the related structural plans and drainage plans yet. As the development proposal concerned is a non-profit-making community facility, the BD has exempted the payment of plan processing fees under section 42 of the BO.

Regarding the fire service installations and equipment on the building plans, upon receipt of the building plans referred under the centralised processing system, the Fire Services Department (FSD) has issued a certificate to the AP concerned on December 28, 2017, confirming that the fire service installations and equipment shown on the building plans complied with the requirements set out in the prevailing "Code of Practice for Minimum Fire Service Installations and Equipment" (i.e. for residential buildings of three storeys or less, fire extinguisher(s) should be provided on each floor).

Up till April 30, 2018, other than the above mentioned proposed development project, the BD and FSD have not received similar building plan submissions, viz. temporary housing development projects using MiC technology.

LCQ4: Safety of banana boats and jet-

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 9):

Question:

Every summer, many people flock to the waters of Hong Kong to engage in a variety of water sports activities, including riding on a banana boat towed by a speed-boat and jet skiing. It is learnt that accidents involving such recreational activities which resulted in deaths and injuries have occurred from time to time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of water sports accidents involving banana boats and jet-skis recorded by the authorities in the past five years;

(2) whether the existing legislation governing vessels regulates jet-skis and non-mechanised vessels such as banana boats; if so, of the details, including the specific requirements under the various provisions and whether such facilities are required to be registered or licensed; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the relevant government departments have conducted inspections regularly on the safety of banana boats and jet-skis; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

(1) From 2012 to 2017, the Marine Department (MD) recorded three accidents involving jet-skis but none involving banana boats (neither banana boats nor pleasure vessels (PVs) towing them).

(2) According to Schedule 1 to the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Certification and Licensing) Regulation (Cap. 548D), jet-skis fall within the vessel type of open cruiser under Class IV vessels (i.e. PVs), for which an Operating Licence (OL) for Local Vessel and a valid third party risks insurance certification must be obtained. An operator must also possess the Pleasure Vessel Operator Certificate of Competency for operating jet-skis. To enhance safety, the MD has endorsed corresponding conditions in the OLs for jet-skis, including permitting the use of jet-skis at daytime only, requiring operators to wear lifejackets and jet-skis to be installed with an equipment commonly known as "kill cord" (i.e. device enabling the engine of a jet-ski to automatically switch off once the operator leaves his seat).

OLs of local vessels are not required for non-mechanised inflatable vessels including banana boats. However, a PV owner who intends to use his vessel for towing inflatable vessels should submit an application in writing to the MD. Upon approval of the application, the MD will endorse the OL of the PV concerned with conditions pertaining to the towing of inflatable boats, including keeping proper lookout on the PV; providing every person on board the vessel being towed with a seat and an independent handhold; and ensuring that each of these persons shall wear a life-jacket.

(3) Apart from conducting regular inspections of PVs, the MD also steps up its patrols and launches anti-speeding operations at popular sites for water sports during the summer. In the summer of 2017, 1 100 inspections of PVs and nine anti-speeding operations were conducted. On the publicity and education fronts, to remind the public to pay attention to their own safety and that of others when taking part in water sports or waterborne recreational activities, the MD collaborates with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and the Hong Kong Police Force in organising the Water Sports Safety Seminar annually, with a view to raising public awareness of water sports safety. The MD also distributes pamphlets on water sports safety to the public with advice on the safe operation of banana boats and jet-skis. As summer draws near, the MD will continue with its relevant work in patrol and education to ensure water sports safety.

Red flag hoisted at Turtle Cove Beach

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (May 9) that due to big waves, the red flag has been hoisted at Turtle Cove Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at the beach.

Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected

cannabis buds (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs seized about 3.3 kilograms of suspected cannabis buds with an estimated market value of about \$720,000 at Hong Kong International Airport on May 6.

Customs officers inspected an air mail parcel from the United States on May 6 and seized about 3.3kg of suspected cannabis buds in the carton box.

After follow-up investigation, Customs officers yesterday (May 8) arrested a 32-year-old man suspected to be involved in the case in Shek Kip Mei.

Investigation is ongoing.

Under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, trafficking in a dangerous drug is a serious offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment.

Members of the public may report any suspected drug trafficking activities to the Customs 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

