

LCQ14: Implementation of the Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

The Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (the Scheme) has been in operation since August 1 this year. Under the Scheme, sellers are required to provide free removal service when they sell a new item of regulated electrical equipment (i.e. air-conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, computers, printers, scanners and monitors) to members of the public. However, quite a number of members of the public have relayed to me that the recycling service operator commissioned by the Government to collect waste electrical equipment (the operator) has failed to meet its performance pledge of collecting such equipment door-to-door within three working days upon receipt of a service request from sellers, with the waiting time even exceeding ten days in some cases. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the number of vehicles and manpower under the operator for providing the recycling service;

(2) whether it knows the average number of items of waste electrical equipment collected daily by the operator since the implementation of the Scheme;

(3) of the number of licence applications for regulated e-waste disposal (including storage, treatment, reprocessing or recycling of e-waste) received, approved and rejected by the Government so far; if it has rejected some applications, of the reasons for that;

(4) of the respective numbers of complaints against the operator and sellers received by the Government since the implementation of the Scheme, and the number of complaints about the disposal of waste electrical equipment on the street;

(5) as it has been reported that since the operator's plant for storing waste electrical equipment is full, the operator has been provided a land on loan by the Government for temporary storage of waste electrical equipment, of the relevant details; whether the operator has breached the contractual requirements by failing to dispose of waste electrical equipment properly;

(6) given that the operator has failed to meet its performance pledge,

whether the Government will consider reviewing the current mode of commissioning an operator and switching to commissioning multiple recyclers and granting subsidies to them according to the quantity of waste electrical equipment they have collected; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(7) given that the operator turns waste electrical and electronic equipment into materials of value (such as plastics and metals) through processes such as detoxification, dismantling and recycling, of the outlets for such materials and the receiver of the income so generated (if any)?

Reply:

President,

The Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), or in short WPRS, came into effect on August 1, 2018. It covers air-conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, computers, printers, scanners and monitors (collectively referred to as regulated electrical equipment, or REE). The WPRS marks another important milestone in Hong Kong's waste reduction and recycling efforts, as WEEE generated locally that would have been otherwise exported for disposal or sent to the landfills are now collected and recycled properly into resources.

Currently, an REE seller is required by law to arrange for its customer a statutory free removal service to collect a used equipment of the same class abandoned by the customer. Upon purchase of the REE item, the customer is entitled to ask the seller to arrange for delivery of the new item and removal of the used item on the same day at no extra charge. REE sellers may provide the statutory free removal service on their own or through other collectors. If a seller opts for the service provided by the operator of the Government's WEEE Treatment and Recycling Facility (WEEE·PARK), i.e. ALBA-IWS, the operator will, after receipt of a service request from the seller, collect the waste equipment three working days from the date of sales as requested by the customer. For instance, if a customer purchases a new item on Monday, the seller may arrange for delivery of the new item and the operator's removal of the used item on the same day on Thursday.

Since its initial operation in October 2017 and up to the end of September 2018, the WEEE·PARK has processed over 6 900 tonnes of WEEE in total, well exceeding the target amount for its first year of operation. The figure reflects that the scheme has initially achieved its objective.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan is as follows:

(1) and (2) The total number of staff currently employed by ALBA-IWS is around 190. Using the combination of its own fleet, outsourced vehicles and in collaboration with relevant industry stakeholders, the operator's logistics team deploys resources flexibly to meet the demand for collection services. Since the implementation of the WPRS, ALBA-IWS handles around 900 collection orders on average on each working day.

(3) As at October 21, 2018, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has issued a total of five waste disposal licences for e-waste (e-WDLs), with another 12 applications being processed. There were another six applications deemed invalid or withdrawn by the applicants because of non-conforming land uses or the operations concerned being within the scope of exemption under the legislation.

(4) From the implementation of the WPRS on August 1 up to October 21 this year, the EPD has received a total of 57 complaints, of which 33 involved REE sellers, 19 were on the operator's services and five of general nature. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) does not keep separate statistics on complaints about the disposal of WEEE on streets. However, according to FEHD, their frontline staff did not observe any major change in the number of waste REE found at refuse collection points before and after the implementation of WPRS.

(5) The WEEE·PARK is a government facility and its operator provides collection and treatment services under the WPRS. As the service demand at the initial implementation stage of the WPRS exceeded the projected demand, the EPD has made available some vacated places in the Kowloon Bay Waste Recycling Centre, which has ceased operation and is to be demolished, as a short term measure, for the temporary storage of WEEE collected from the public to be transferred to WEEE·PARK for treatment. There was no breach of the contractual requirement on the part of the operator in relation to this short term measure.

(6) Following adjustments made after the initial period, the scheme has been operating smoothly in general. The operator has been able to collect the waste equipment from customers three working days after receipt of the service requests. Only in certain special circumstances (less than 0.1% of the cases), the operator might take longer time to arrange for the collection, for instance, from more remote locations in the outlying islands due to the need to accommodate the conveyor schedule. In terms of treatment performance, as mentioned above the actual quantity processed by the operator up to the end of September has exceeded its target quantity for its first year of operation. There is no question of the operator being unable to meet the contractual requirements.

The design capacity of the WEEE·PARK is about 30 000 tonnes per year, which is roughly half of the amount of waste REE generated in Hong Kong every year. There is room for existing and potential recyclers to participate in the market for treating waste REE. If necessary, the WEEE·PARK may increase its capacity by arranging an additional shift in the operation of the facility to cope with the demand. As mentioned above, up to October 21 this year, the EPD has issued a total of five e-WDLs, with another 12 applications being processed. We encourage licensed recyclers to take part in the recycling and treatment of waste REE. We will also continue to keep abreast of the market development to ensure that the overall handling capacity locally is adequate to underpin the implementation of the WPRS.

(7) Under the contract, the Government will determine and pay the operator the operation fee calculated based on the actual weight of WEEE collected and treated. The operator will properly separate and remove small amount of harmful substances such as heavy metal (e.g. mercury, lead) and greenhouse gases from WEEE by using advanced technologies and equipment. Other parts of WEEE will be dismantled and shredded, followed by safe sorting and screening procedures to turn them into sorted plastic and metal materials of high quality for reuse in other industrial productions. The remaining small amount of waste that cannot be recycled or reused will be sent to the landfills or other EPD recognised treatment facilities for proper handling. Any income or expenditure arising from the disposal of such recyclables and waste is borne by the operator in full.

Transcript of remarks by STH

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, at a media session after touring the Hong Kong Port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge on its first day of operation this morning (October 24):

Secretary for Transport and Housing: Today we have the official opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge which is serving Hong Kong citizens and tourists from overseas. As we can see, they are all very excited and trying to be the first ones to board the bus, buy the ticket and exit the Departure Hall. So I would expect this would provide Hong Kong citizens and tourists a very pleasant travel experience.

Reporter: Given what you are seeing on the first day of the Bridge opening, do you think that the existing quota and also the capacity of the Hong Kong Port area will suffice to provide for the number of visitors and people who are going through the Port area, in the medium to long term?

Secretary for Transport and Housing: I would say that the capacity of handling is going to increase in the years to come. As we can see, there are roughly about 100 cross-boundary coaches from Hong Kong to the Mainland. Also, I was given to understand that some 30 000 tourists will be coming over from the Mainland to Hong Kong. We will keep a close watch of the situation and try to mobilise more resources in enabling our handling capacity so as to give all Hong Kong residents and passengers a pleasant travelling experience.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

[Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected duty-not-paid water pipe tobacco \(with photo\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs seized about 6 600 kilograms of suspected duty-not-paid water pipe tobacco with an estimated market value of about \$2.6 million and a duty potential of about \$15 million at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound on October 22.

Through risk assessment, Customs officers inspected a container arriving in Hong Kong from Jordan. Upon inspection, Customs officers found the batch of suspected duty-not-paid water pipe tobacco in the container.

Investigation is ongoing.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying duty-not-paid tobacco commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

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



[LC Urgent Q1: Disruptions of railway services](#)

Following is an urgent question by the Hon Gary Fan under Rule 24(4) of the Rules of Procedure and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and

Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

On the early morning of the 16th of this month, staff members of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) completed the tests on a new signalling system for the MTR Tsuen Wan Line and reverted to the existing system. However, they found that the signalling systems of the Tsuen Wan Line, the Island Line and the Kwun Tong Line had all broken down simultaneously and could not be fixed before the first trains commenced service. The signalling system of the Tseung Kwan O Line also broke down later. As a result, all these four railway lines could only provide limited services during the morning rush hours. This also caused severe knock-on effect and chaos on the road traffic, affecting hundreds of thousands of members of the public. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council, given that MTRCL is gradually replacing the signalling systems of various railway lines, whether the Government and MTRCL will take immediate measures to prevent the relevant works from causing disruptions of railway services, and whether they will expeditiously formulate contingency plans (including alternative public transport services) to deal with large-scale disruptions of railway services?

Reply:

President,

During the morning peak hours on October 16, train services of the MTR Island, Tsuen Wan, Kwun Tong and Tseung Kwan O lines suffered from service disruption. Although train service was not suspended, the carrying capacity of the four railway lines were reduced with limited train service with intervals of about 12 to 15 minutes. The incident covered a wide area affecting numerous passengers. The Government and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) are sparing no efforts to look into the cause of the incident in order to avoid recurrence. Regarding the question raised by the Hon Gary Fan, I will reply from the following aspects.

In the early morning on October 16, MTRCL conducted testing of the new signalling system along the Tsuen Wan line, during which both the new and existing systems functioned normally. Before 5am, MTRCL switched back the signalling system to the existing one to prepare for train services. At 5.28am, the Operations Control Centre found that trains on the Island, Tsuen Wan and Kwun Tong lines were unable to receive target speed instruction. Out of safety concern, trains on these three lines were switched to manual mode at reduced speed from the start of train service at around 6am. During the period, the over-speed protection function of the trains continued to function in ensuring railway safety.

Engineering personnel of the MTRCL immediately carried out emergency repair works. Having failed to recover the system, engineering personnel then attempted to reboot the signalling system of the respective lines one by one. At 5.52am before the first train commenced service, MTRCL informed the Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre (ETCC) of the Transport Department (TD) and issued amber and red alarms consecutively according to the

established contingency plan, requesting other public transport operators to enhance services. During the emergency repair works, the Tseung Kwan O lines also suffered from signalling fault and trains were switched to manual mode at reduced speed. Upon rebooting the computers at the stations along the four railway lines, emergency repair works were completed one after another by 11.45am and train service gradually resumed to normal frequencies.

Upon receiving MTRCL's notification, taking into account the severity of the incident, the ETCC of TD upgraded its operation level to Level 2, led by directorate staff of TD, and deployed additional staff to co-ordinate other public transports and to provide emergency support. The Centre urged MTRCL to disseminate information to passengers and closely monitor and manage passenger flow in stations. It also contacted and requested franchised bus and tram operators to enhance service and sent additional staff to assist passengers in queuing. With TD's co-ordination, 11 routes of franchised bus, 24 additional trams and the Star Ferry enhanced its service during the incident to assist in picking up affected passengers. During the period, TD disseminated information to the public through media, website and mobile applications, and also deployed personnel to key affected stations. The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) also deployed personnel to MTRCL's Operating Control Centre and Kowloon Bay Central Equipment Room to observe train operations and monitor the repair works.

During the incident, the MTRCL deployed an additional 400 staff to assist passengers, including conducting crowd control at stations. MTRCL also updated the public on the relevant information through media briefings, its mobile applications, and broadcasts at stations and inside train compartments. During the incident, ticket gates of each affected station were switched to a specific mode, of which passenger fare was not deducted.

According to the initial investigation by MTRCL, the incident was likely caused by unsmooth operation and data processing of the existing signalling system software. After resetting, all systems along the lines have returned to stable operation. Based on the abovementioned initial investigation findings, EMSD has requested the MTRCL to continue in-depth investigation, while conducting an overhaul on the related equipment of the signalling system and submit a detailed report in two months. MTRCL has set up an investigation panel. It shall arrange overseas and local experts to assist in the investigation, and conduct a comprehensive review on the system with the signalling system supplier. Directions of the detailed investigation include data processing synchronisation arrangements of the signalling systems undertaken by two suppliers, whether there are any potential software compatibility problems, and whether the interconnection and communication of the railway lines are smooth. EMSD will continue to monitor the investigation work.

TD will also review the existing contingency plan, including the arrangements of free shuttle buses by MTRCL during the incident, and whether there is room for other public transport operators to enhance services during the incident, in order to improve the handling of similar incidents in future. However, it should be noted that shuttle bus service is an emergency supplementary measure with limited carrying capacity, and would be subject to

factors such as road conditions, which can hardly replace normal train service.

As regards to Member's question on whether the incident is related to the signalling system upgrading project, according to the signalling system alarm log of the MTRCL, the incident indeed occurred after MTRCL switched back the signalling system to the existing one and operated it for some time. There was no evidence showing correlation between the incident and the signalling system upgrading project. That said, the MTRCL has further strengthened its monitoring and maintenance of the existing systems when testing the new signalling system, and has deployed additional personnel to stand by at stations' signalling equipment room to expedite the repair works. Separately, EMSD has discussed with MTRCL to temporarily segregate the inter-connection of railway lines to avoid them to be affected by one another under similar incidents. As mentioned above, EMSD and MTRCL including the expert panel set up by MTRCL will also review whether the incident was indeed not related to the signalling system upgrading project when conducting the in-depth investigation.

Government releases Interim Report of Expert Adviser Team on Shatin to Central Link Project

The Expert Adviser Team on the Shatin to Central Link (SCL) Project has submitted Interim Report No. 1 to the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB). It was uploaded to the THB website today (October 24) (www.thb.gov.hk/eng/psp/publications/transport/studies/index.htm).

Comprising three senior retired government officers, the Expert Adviser Team carried out site visits, reviewed relevant documents and met with MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) and the relevant government departments to look into matters concerning the management and construction of the SCL Project. Interim Report No. 1 includes observations and views of the Expert Adviser Team regarding the steel bar connection works in the East West Line platform slab and diaphragm walls at the Hung Hom Station Extension site, as well as the settlement-related issues at the Exhibition Centre Station and To Kwa Wan Station sites.

The THB agreed with the 16 preliminary recommendations made by the Expert Adviser Team. Nine of the preliminary recommendations are related to the Hung Hom Station Extension works, four are on settlement issues, and the remaining three are about project management in general.

On the recommendations with respect to the Hung Hom Station Extension,

subsequent to discussions with the Government and the Expert Adviser Team, the MTRCL has agreed to formulate a holistic strategy for assessing the acceptability of the built structures. The strategy should encompass a combination of diagnoses, including verifying objective evidence, physical inspections through opening up the structures and conducting non-destructive tests, instead of relying solely on the load test as previously proposed. Furthermore, apart from the East West Line platform slab, the North South Line platform slab and the diaphragm walls should also be assessed.

The MTRCL submitted a proposal for verification of part of the East West Line platform slab to the Highways Department on October 15, 2018. As the proposal obviously failed to meet the requirements of the holistic assessment strategy described above, the Government has requested the MTRCL to submit a strategy conforming to the recommendations of the Expert Adviser Team by the end of this month, so as to investigate and address matters relating to the Hung Hom Station Extension works expeditiously.

Regarding the settlement-related issues, the Expert Adviser Team's recommendations were incorporated into the monitoring and announcement mechanism for the impact of SCL works on nearby structures and public facilities promulgated on September 28, 2018. The Expert Adviser Team will audit selected cases of the SCL Project to assess the effectiveness of the monitoring and control system.

The Expert Adviser Team will continue to review the project management system of the MTRCL, and recommend additional management and monitoring measures to be undertaken by the MTRCL and the relevant government departments as appropriate in taking forward the SCL Project. The Expert Adviser Team will also provide expert advice on matters (including settlement issues) relating to the works of the SCL Project.