

EPD responds to concerns regarding food waste recycling services

In response to recent media reports on the food waste recycling measures in Hong Kong, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has made the following response today (April 16):

The EPD has been actively expanding the food waste collection network, including supporting the collection of food waste from commercial and industrial sectors and households. Currently, there are approximately 900 food waste collection points across the territory with a daily collection quantity of about 210 tonnes, representing an increase of 40 per cent compared to the same period last year.

The EPD, together with the Housing Department (HD) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS), are expanding the food waste recycling services to all public rental housing (PRH) estates at full steam. At present, the EPD has installed about 530 food waste smart recycling bins (FWSRBs) in 70 per cent (about 150) of the PRH estates in Hong Kong. The EPD's target is to complete the installation of more than 700 FWSRBs in all of the 213 PRH estates across the territory by this August, covering about one-third of the population in Hong Kong. Some media reported that as of February 2024, no FWSRBs had been installed in the PRH estates of Yau Tsim Mong District and Wan Chai District. With the fact that each of the two districts has one PRH estate managed by HKHS, the EPD had already installed a FWSRB in Prosperous Garden, Yau Tsim Mong District on March 13, while the FWSRB in Lai Tak Tsuen, Wan Chai is expected to commence operation by the end of April.

There were some recent media reports stating that the FWSRBs in some individual PRH estates, such as Yau Lai Estate, Kin Ming Estate, and Choi Hung Estate were found to be fully loaded or malfunctioning. Each FWSRB is equipped with an inner bin with a capacity of 120 liters. When the collected food waste reaches 70 per cent capacity, the system will automatically notify the cleaning staff to replace the inner bin. Since there is no limit to the number of times the inner bin can be replaced, each FWSRB can serve at least one to two PRH blocks. Based on actual experience, each inner bin can accommodate food waste from 60 to 70 households, and each FWSRB is sufficient to serve at least 500 households. The EPD has already allocated additional resources to hire manpower for the replacement and cleaning of FWSRBs in the PRH estates. The department estimated an average participation rate of about 10 to 15 per cent in the first year of food waste recycling in PRH estates. As residents gradually develop the habit of food waste recycling, the participation rate is expected to increase progressively. The EPD will review the usage rate of FWSRBs in each PRH estate from time to time and gradually increase the number of FWSRBs in estates where usage is higher.

Regarding the operation of FWSRBs, the EPD's big data platform indicated that, in general, over 99 per cent of the FWSRBs are functioning normally. In the event of machine failure, the system will automatically restart the

FWSRB. If it still cannot be used, the contractor will send technicians for repairs within 48 hours, and additional FWSRBs are available for swift replacement when necessary.

To further enhance the speed of notification, the EPD has established a new alert system. When FWSRBs are unable to normally operate due to bin full or malfunctioning for more than an hour, the system will automatically send messages to the HD's estate management offices and their cleaning contractors for immediate follow-up, while the EPD will also closely monitor the situation on the big data platform. Additionally, the EPD has optimised the screen interface of the FWSRBs. When the inner bin becomes full, the screen displays "Temporarily Full", making it easier for cleaning staff and residents to understand the status of the FWSRB and expediting notifications to responsible parties. For PRH estates experiencing malfunctions or higher food waste quantities, cleaning staff will place traditional purple food waste bins next to the FWSRBs to ensure an uninterrupted food waste recycling service and maintain environmental hygiene.

For private housing, unlike the PRH estates, relevant stakeholders of residential buildings (such as owners' corporation /owners' committees or property management companies) have to discuss and reach a consensus on participating in the food waste recycling programmes before applying for relevant government funding schemes. The Government has been supporting the installation of FWSRBs in private residential buildings mainly through the Recycling Fund and the Environment and Conservation Fund. The Environmental Campaign Committee and the EPD collaborated to roll out the Pilot Scheme on FWSRBs in Private Housing Estates in end December last year, accepting applications for FWSRBs from private housing estates with over 1 000 households. Currently, the Pilot Scheme has received over 150 applications. The EPD has expedited the approval process and will arrange meetings with applicants to determine the installation locations of FWSRBs as soon as all the required application documents are received. Meanwhile, housing estates have to facilitate the installation of power sockets or other required small-scale engineering equipment (such as platforms, additional lighting and canopies) as well as arranging manpower and resources. The EPD would install the FWSRBs as soon as possible upon completion of these works by the estates (generally three to four months after collecting all the required documents). Currently, about 40 applications for the Pilot Scheme have been approved, and approximately 20 FWSRBs have been installed in five private housing estates.

For residential buildings without sufficient space to install FWSRBs, the EPD has set up FWSRBs for public use in GREEN@SHAM SHUI PO, GREEN@EASTERN and GREEN@SAIKUNG, and will expand to GREEN@SHATIN by the end of April. Moreover, the EPD has added 55 "Food Waste Recycling Spots" in various districts from March to April this year, providing scheduled food waste collection services at designated locations during the nighttime. The first public food waste collection point set up in public market under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will also be launched on April 18 at the Lockhart Road Market. If this trial programme receives positive feedback, the EPD will consider expanding it to more public markets.

To facilitate food and beverage establishments in recycling food waste, the EPD has set up food waste collection points at 65 Refuse Collection Points (RCPs), and will increase to nearly 100 RCPs in the second quarter of 2024. The public can also use these collection points to recycle food waste. In addition, the EPD collects food waste from clusters of restaurants over 15 districts in Hong Kong through mobile booths or trucks, providing a convenient recycling option for restaurants.

In order to enhance the cost-effectiveness and environmental hygiene of food waste collection, 10 government venues and private premises with funding support have installed food waste pre-treatment systems ("Food TranSmarter"). Additionally, there are about 20 projects under preparation. The collected food waste is converted into slurry through the pre-treatment systems and can be temporarily stored for several days before being delivered to the food waste treatment facilities for conversion into energy, thereby reducing transportation costs.

The EPD will continue to strengthen publicity and promotion to the public and various sectors in the community, and provide more training and support to encourage active participation in food waste recycling, with a view to increasing the amount of food waste recovered in Hong Kong in an orderly manner.