

EPD's response to Ombudsman's direct investigation report

The Office of the Ombudsman today (August 17) released a report on its direct investigation into the Government's enforcement against defective sewage works of New Territories Exempted Houses (NTEHs). The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) thanked the Office for proactively carrying out the investigation. The EPD agreed and accepted recommendations as suggested in the report and will actively follow up. The Office also recognised the EPD's work in introducing new technologies as additional investigation tools to spot the source of pollution. The EPD will continue to make good use of new technologies with a view to enhancing law enforcement efficiency.

On the report's recommendation to further enhance the use of electronic media, social platforms and the Announcement in the Public Interest to provide relevant information and to promote to residents of village houses in the New Territories the importance of proper use of septic tank systems and their maintenance, the EPD launched a publicity campaign at the end of 2022, including the set-up of a thematic webpage on "Tips on Proper Operation of a Septic Tank System"

(www.epd.gov.hk/epd/sites/default/files/epd/english/environmentinhk/water/guide_ref/files/tips_septic_tank.pdf) and distribution of publicity materials to residents living in village houses that have not yet been connected to public sewage systems, with the support of the Heung Yee Kuk New Territories. Up to July 2023, over 30 000 sets of publicity materials had been distributed to more than 300 villages. The Department will continue to carry out the publicity work.

Moreover, the EPD supported the report's recommendation of setting up an interdepartmental working group by following up with relevant departments and attending the first interdepartmental meeting held in early August to discuss and formulate referral procedures and methods for information exchange among departments, in order to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of following up on complaints.