

Government examines progress of anti-rodent and anti-mosquito work implemented by departments (with photo/video)

The interdepartmental Pest Control Steering Committee (PCSC) held its 15th meeting today (July 31) to examine the work progress of departments since the launch of the Cross-sectoral Territory-wide Anti-rodent Action (the Action) in end 2022, and to plan the anti-rodent work for the future based on the policy steer formulated by the Steering Committee on District Governance and the Task Force on District Governance. Furthermore, the PCSC reviewed the situation of mosquito proliferation this year thus far and the anti-mosquito work taken by departments, and discussed appropriate measures, in view of the influx of people arriving in Hong Kong from dengue endemic areas in the first summer holiday since the resumption to normalcy.

Progress of the Action

In the meeting, the representative of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) reported the outcomes of its anti-rodent work in the past year. From July 2022 to June 2023, the FEHD caught around 57 500 live rodents, an increase of about 59 per cent from around 36 200 rodents caught in the corresponding period of the previous year (July 2021 to June 2022). In the past year, the FEHD has implemented various new measures on anti-rodent, including:

- setting up overnight rodent control roving teams in all districts across Hong Kong;
- applying new technologies, tools and baits, such as T-shaped bait boxes and alcohol rodent trapping devices, in order to strengthen the efficiency of rodent trapping;
- engaging three pest control service contractors in February 2023 to conduct a three-month anti-rodent operation in three public markets, in order to introduce anti-rodent strategies more suitable to the situation of public markets;
- extending the trial scheme of allowing food premises to place large-size waste containers in rear lanes, and requesting relevant premises to strengthen rodent prevention and control. Meanwhile, the Environmental Protection Department has also been trialling the placement of purple food waste recycling bins in some of the aforementioned rear lanes. These trial schemes can improve the environmental hygiene of rear lanes and alleviate the problem of rodent infestation; and
- making use of thermal cameras with artificial intelligence technology at individual survey locations for tracking rodent activities, with a view to formulating a more representative new Rodent Infestation Rate (RIR)

to progressively replace the existing RIR based on the ratio of sweet potato baits gnawed for a more accurate reflection of the situation of rodent infestation.

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The Under Secretary of Environment and Ecology, and the Chairperson of the PCSC, Miss Diane Wong, inspected Sham Shui Po District recently, and listened to the report by the Pest Control Officer i/c, Mr Lee Ming-wai on the preliminary results of using thermal cameras in replacement of sweet potato baits in tracking rodent activities. The data obtained in the trial project in Kowloon City District earlier demonstrates that the new technology has high sensitivity and precision, as well as low risk of being damaged and influenced by human factors (see the video).

The FEHD will continue conducting strategic anti-rodent operations at 108 priority rodent black spots across the city in order to improve the rodent infestation situations in these areas in a comprehensive and continuous manner, with a view to achieving the target of reducing the number of priority rodent black spots at least by half by end 2023 as set out in the 2022 Policy Address.

To effectively control and handle rodent infestation necessitates cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and community-wide efforts, as well as the joint efforts of all relevant departments. The Government, therefore, launched the Action on December 28, 2022, under which all sectors of the community were encouraged to be active stakeholders, and all relevant departments were mobilised to collaborate in anti-rodent work. Representatives of relevant departments reported their actions taken under the Action at the meeting. For instance, the Hong Kong Housing Authority has implemented the "Anti-rodent Action in Estates" in its public housing estates since the beginning of this year to strengthen daily cleaning and anti-rodent work, and has made good use of technology, installing mobile surveillance systems in locations with serious rodent infestation to detect rodent activities, as well as adopting other new rodent control devices, etc. District Offices have also incorporated anti-rodent services into the service contracts for providing cleaning services to the common parts of "three-nil" buildings on a need basis.

In order to further consolidate the effectiveness of rodent control, all departments agreed to continue strengthening rodent prevention and control measures in premises under their respective management, to strengthen internal monitoring and assessment of the outcome of rodent control work, and to actively encourage relevant sectors and stakeholders to co-operate with the Government's work, eliminating rodents' fundamental survival conditions of food, harbourage and passages from their respective areas.

Mosquito control

The representative of the FEHD also reported to the PCSC the situation of mosquito proliferation this year thus far. The overall trend of the Gravidtrap Index for *Aedes albopictus* in the first half of this year is

similar to that of last year, with the Gravidtrap Index starting to rise since the rainy season commenced in April. Relevant departments immediately stepped up mosquito control work as planned, including eliminating mosquito breeding places, applying larvicides, conducting fogging operations to eradicate adult mosquitoes, and placing mosquito trapping devices at suitable locations. The FEHD has also conducted inspections with relevant departments, and provided them with professional advice and technical support. With the concerted efforts of various departments, the situation of mosquito proliferation in June this year was largely under control, and it had not worsened as the weather turned hotter and rainier like last year. The Gravidtrap Index of most survey areas further declined in the first phase of monitoring in July. This year thus far, the number of survey areas with the Gravidtrap Index reaching the highest Level 4 is less than that of the same period last year, while no local dengue fever (DF) cases have been recorded in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, mosquitoes may carry the virus and spread it as they bite patients with DF (such as imported cases), resulting in local infection. Considering that the number of arrivals from dengue endemic areas will be higher in the first summer holiday since the resumption to normalcy, and that there is an increase in DF cases recorded in some areas in Asia (such as Malaysia, Taiwan and Thailand) and South America compared to the same period last year with a rising trend, the Chairperson of the PCSC specifically reminded all departments and members of the public not to let their guard down in the coming two months, and that they should continue implementing mosquito prevention and control work.

The Department of Health will also continue conducting health education at all boundary control points, reminding inbound travellers and returnees from dengue endemic areas to take precautions against mosquito-borne diseases, such as to continue applying insect repellent containing DEET to uncovered areas of the body or clothing as a preventive measure for 14 days upon arrival in Hong Kong. If feeling unwell, such as having a fever, they should seek medical advice promptly and provide travel details to the doctor.

Furthermore, focusing on those places where the situation of mosquito proliferation requires more attention (such as residential buildings and open spaces), the representative of the FEHD reminded relevant departments to take targeted measures, such as strengthening inspections of the relevant venues and the surrounding environment, eliminating potential breeding places for mosquitoes, and adopting appropriate mosquito control devices. All departments should also continue supporting the All-out Anti-mosquito Operations, strengthening anti-mosquito work in premises under their respective management before the end of the rainy season.

The meeting was chaired by Miss Wong. Participants of the meeting came from three policy bureaux and 20 government departments and organisations.

