

# Government maps out pest control work for the year (with photo)

The inter-departmental Pest Control Steering Committee held a meeting today (January 22) to map out the work plan and targets for this year. The Committee reviewed the effectiveness of enhanced anti-rodent and anti-mosquito work of various departments as well as the promotion and application of technology. Various departments agreed to carry out pest control work in areas under their purview according to the work plan in the coming year.

Various departments briefed the meeting on the progress of the strengthened anti-rodent work in all 18 districts. This included enforcement operations against irregularities of food premises such as food preparation in back alleys by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), stepping up cleaning and pest control measures in 52 priority public rental housing (PRH) estates from June to November last year by the Housing Authority (HA) and another 37 priority PRH estates had been selected in last December, and completion of improvement works in back alleys in various districts by the Highways Department (HyD) after taking the community's feedback into account.

An international rodent infestation expert recommended by the World Health Organization inspected anti-rodent work in Hong Kong last November, and had proposed a series of concrete measures to enhance the effectiveness of this work. The measures include using more than one kind of bait at the same time, placing kill traps in suitable environments and rotating rodenticides with a view to reducing rodents' ability to develop resistance. In particular, the expert pointed out the importance of increasing public participation in anti-rodent work, for example, the results would be more significant when members of the public are motivated to carry out anti-rodent work in households.

As for the targets of the anti-rodent work this year, the Government will strengthen prevention of rodent infestation, further step up anti-rodent work by making reference to the advice of the international expert, and eliminate the three survival conditions of rodents – namely food, harbourage and passages – by improving the condition of environmental hygiene. Specifically, the Committee expects a fewer number of complaints related to rodents than last year as well as higher numbers of rodents caught and rodent holes blocked than last year, the HA will continue to identify priority PRH estates and to implement additional measures in those estates, the HyD is to complete around 100 improvement work items subject to actual needs and conditions, and the FEHD is to use quantitative data extensively in anti-rodent work.

As regards to the monitoring of rodent activities, the FEHD is preparing the use of thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence analytical functions to assess the effectiveness of anti-rodent work. Initial test

results have shown that thermal imaging cameras can effectively monitor rodent activities. The data collected can be used to compare the rodent infestation situation before and after anti-rodent operations. The technology can also be used to identify rodents' entry points, travel routes and areas they frequently visit so that rodenticides and trapping devices can be placed in a more effective manner and more targeted rodent control measures can be implemented.

Meanwhile, the FEHD conducted a baseline study in Kowloon City District this month and installed thermal imaging cameras in designated areas to measure the extent of rodent activities and the number of rodents. After further trials, the FEHD will extend the baseline study to all districts in Hong Kong to establish a quantifying new rodent infestation surveillance mechanism with a view to replacing the current Rodent Infestation Rate which could only reflect the extensiveness of the problem by calculating the percentage of baits bitten. The new mechanism is to assess the effectiveness of anti-rodent work and quantify rodent infestation.

In respect of intensive anti-rodent operations conducted in public markets, the FEHD has adjusted its anti-rodent operations after making reference to the experience of trials conducted earlier in Lai Wan Market, Ap Lei Chau Market and Kam Tin Market as well as the views of the international rodent infestation expert. The FEHD will carry out another round of anti-rodent operations in three additional public markets in February. The FEHD will assess the effectiveness of the operations in June and implement effective modus operandi in other markets.

As regards to anti-mosquito work, the Government will consolidate the results achieved last year including the number of local dengue fever cases, which dropped from 29 in 2018 to one last year, and the ovitrap index for *Aedes albopictus* that was maintained at a low level throughout the year. Specifically, the number of areas with Area Ovitrap Index (AOI) exceeding 40 per cent dropped from three in 2018 to one last year and the number of areas with AOI exceeding the alert level of 20 per cent for two months or more dropped from six in 2018 to four last year.

The Government will continue to strengthen prevention, co-ordination and surveillance. The targets for the coming year include: continue to prevent the occurrence of local dengue fever cases; further reduce AOI (namely to maintain no more than two areas with AOI exceeding the alert level of 20 per cent for two months or more, and no area with AOI exceeding 40 per cent); and quantify the number of adult mosquitoes by the FEHD this year. By releasing the adult mosquito density index, the FEHD hopes to relax the limitation of the current AOI, which can only reflect the distribution of *Aedes albopictus*. The data of the adult mosquito density index can better reflect the effectiveness of mosquito control work and facilitate various departments to formulate more targeted anti-mosquito work. As such, the FEHD conducted field trials on a new design ovitrap from June to November last year and has finalised the design. To replace the existing ovitraps, around 5 000 new-design ovitraps will be installed over the territory in March 2020.

Furthermore, in view of the significant effectiveness of a new type of mosquito trap trialed by various departments since last September, departments will use the traps extensively. Around 2 700 new mosquito traps will be put in place in areas under their purview before March this year with a view to effectively preventing mosquito breeding before the onset of the rainy season. Various departments will continue to adopt last year's modus operandi of All-out Anti-mosquito Operations, eliminate breeding grounds early and commence fogging operations simultaneously until the end of the rainy season.

As prevention measures, the Government will commence mosquito control work early this year and will continue to strengthen the work in three aspects, namely prevention, co-ordination and surveillance. In areas where the problem of mosquitoes are more severe, the Government will carry out timely mosquito control work through inter-departmental co-ordination. Furthermore, the Government will continue to make use of technology to enhance the effectiveness of mosquito prevention and control work.

Representatives from three bureaux, 20 departments and one organisation attended today's meeting.

