

LCQ 20: Handling of fallen trees and broken branches

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (November 14):

Question:

It is now nearly two months since the onslaught of super typhoon Mangkhut in Hong Kong, but fallen trees and broken branches awaiting clearance can still be seen in various places throughout Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the total number of workers involved in handling fallen trees and broken branches at public places after the onslaught of Mangkhut, with a breakdown by (i) the work procedure which they perform/performed (e.g. sawing trees, removing trunks and branches), (ii) the government department and the service contractor engaged by the government department under which such workers are/were employed, and (iii) whether such workers are/were additional manpower recruited;

(2) of the types and quantities of tools and machines currently used by various government departments and their service contractors for handling fallen trees and broken branches; and

(3) whether it will consider procuring advanced machines (e.g. large chippers) to save the manpower and time needed for clearing fallen trees and broken branches?

Reply:

President,

Super-typhoon Mangkhut has caused extensive damage to trees, and over 60 800 tree failure reports have been received. After the typhoon, various government departments worked in close collaboration to clean up fallen trees and broken branches. The clean-up work is mainly undertaken by the government departments managing the land or facilities where the trees are located, including, among others, the Highways Department (HyD), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) and the Lands Department (LandsD). Different methods are used in handling fallen trees depending on their size and specific locations. Workers have to cut large fallen trees with thick trunks and branches into small logs with chain saws before removing them. For collapsed trees at constrained locations that are not accessible to engineering vehicles, the work and logistics involved are more complicated, hence taking longer time for their removal.

Various major tree management departments have made every effort to remove the fallen trees. Some public works contractors also expanded their designated clean-up areas to speed up the removal of obstacles caused by fallen trees and broken branches. In addition, employees of some contractors and tool suppliers formed volunteer teams to help clear fallen trees. To expedite the clearance operations, the Fire Services Department suspended all training courses and redeployed 180 members to such operations. The Civil Aid Services was also mobilised to remove fallen trees from blocked thoroughfares. In addition to the 10 000-odd people mobilised by the Government each day to take part in the clearance operations, volunteers from various sectors across the community, including the disciplined services, also joined in clearing fallen trees and debris.

Government departments clean up fallen trees in three stages. Clearance of fallen trees blocking pedestrian and traffic flow has been completed, allowing the society to quickly resume operations and citizens to get on with their normal life. Government departments are now cleaning up areas frequented by the public (such as parks, cycle tracks, hiking trails, etc.), which will be progressively completed by the end of this year. Areas that do not affect the daily activities of the public (such as roadside slopes and remote areas in the country parks) will be progressively cleared by the first quarter of 2019.

My reply to the three-part question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

(1) After the passage of Typhoon Mangkhut, government departments deployed some 15 262 workers (including contractors' workers) to clear fallen trees and broken branches. Breakdown is as follows:

Government departments	Number of workers involved in clearing tree debris
Housing Department	2 950
HyD	1 200
LCSD	900
Civil Engineering and Development Department	900
Drainage Services Department	326
ArchSD	258
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department	250
Water Supplies Department	128
LandsD	350
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department	8 000

Total	15 262
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Government departments and their contractors adopt a one-stop service approach and work in collaboration to clean up fallen trees and broken branches. They adjust manpower deployment according to operational needs. The number of manpower involved in or additionally recruited for various work processes is not documented. The departments set out above have hired more than 90 service contractors in total.

(2) The fallen trees vary in size and are in different locations. Therefore, government departments need to use different machinery and equipment to cater for different situations when clearing fallen trees. For example, grab lorries or crane lorries are used for collapsed trees along public roads to speed up clearance work, while only smaller equipment can be used in locations without vehicular access. The machinery and equipment used by the Government and its contractors for clearance of fallen trees include handsaws, chain-saws, pole saws, powered pole saws, tree felling grapples, grab lorries, hydraulic platform vehicles and crane lorries, etc. We have not kept statistics on the use of each type of machinery and equipment.

(3) Government departments will bring in appropriate tools to facilitate tree management work having regard to actual conditions and operational needs. Large shredders, which generate noise during operation, can only be used away from residential areas. At present, the HyD has taken the lead in testing the use of wood chippers on the roads. Besides, the review of the response and recovery work in respect of Typhoon Mangkhut coordinated by the Security Bureau has commenced. The Government will review the response and recovery work, including the adequacy of equipment and machinery, in light of the experience gained in tackling Typhoon Mangkhut.