

LCQ1: Operation of concrete batching plants

Following is a question by the Hon Lam So-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (February 16):

Question:

In reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council at the Council meeting on June 16 last year, the Secretary for Development indicated that the Government was studying the provision of a site in Tseung Kwan O (TKO) Area 137 for reprovisioning a concrete batching plant (CBP) in the Yau Tong Industrial Area, and it anticipated that the CBP would be put into operation in 2024 at the earliest. I have learnt that residents of the district have rallied to object to the plan and submitted to the Government a letter jointly signed by over 10 000 residents to express their opposition. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details and progress of the aforesaid study;

(2) given that Area 137 has been planned as a new community primarily for housing purpose, and a large number of residents in the TKO district are concerned about the impacts of the aforesaid CBP on the environment, traffic safety and air quality of the district, whether the Development Bureau will scale up the aforesaid study to make long-term planning for the siting of the aforesaid CBP, including relocating it to a rock cavern; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that law enforcement officers of the Environmental Protection Department had repeatedly found malpractices of a CBP located at 22 Tung Yuen Street, Yau Tong, the Department issued on April 29, 2021 a notice to reject the CBP's application for renewal of a Specified Process Licence (SPL), but it is learnt that the CBP is still in operation after lodging an appeal, of the outcome of the appeal case; whether the Government will amend the legislation and step up law enforcement efforts targeting cases of violations of SPL terms, so as to improve the licensing regime concerned; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Concrete is extensively used in construction projects in Hong Kong and reliable concrete supply is very important. As freshly mixed concrete will harden shortly, it must be delivered timely to construction sites in various regions. Otherwise, the quality of concrete may be affected. Therefore, the locations of CBPs entail a geographical consideration. A number of CBPs have

been set up in various regions over the territory to supply concrete for the construction projects in nearby areas. The operator of a CBP is required to apply for a SPL issued by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) in order to ensure no environmental nuisance would be caused to the nearby residents. Currently, CBPs in Yau Tong are supplying concrete for the construction projects in East Kowloon and New Territories East. In recent years, Yau Tong district has gradually transformed from a traditional industrial area into a residential and commercial area, and hence the operation of CBPs in the district may lead to the land use compatibility issues and the concerns on the air pollution and noise nuisance.

In order to cope with the development of East Kowloon and New Territories East, there is an actual need to identify an appropriate site for the market to set up a CBP within the region and the Government has completed the identification of the site for the CBP concerned. As for the location of the CBP, we have to consider a number of factors, including higher concrete demand locations, compatibility of land use, environmental and traffic impacts, and whether the site will facilitate the operation of the CBP such as a waterfront site to allow transportation of raw materials by sea for concrete production to avoid increasing loading on road traffic.

Upon consulting the Environment Bureau, our consolidated reply to the various parts of question is as follows:

(1) & (2) Our study proposes to establish a temporary CBP at TKO Area 137, which is a waterfront area located on the southern side of the TKO Industrial Estate to provide a reliable supply of concrete to support the development of East Kowloon and New Territories East and allow transportation of raw materials by sea for concrete production to avoid increasing loadings on road traffic. Currently, the majority of land in that area is used as a temporary fill bank for storing public fill. We are now preparing for the statutory procedures in the next stage. If everything goes as planned, the site will be tendered on a short term lease of seven years. Taking into account the time required for the necessary procedures together with construction, we anticipate that the CBP would be put into operation in 2024 at the earliest, until 2029.

The proposed CBP in TKO Area 137 is temporary in nature. In the long run, we will review the site selection of the CBP at appropriate time to suit for the future development of TKO Area 137.

(3) As the CBP at 22 Tung Yuen Street failed to demonstrate her capability to provide, install and effectively operate the necessary measures for preventing emission of pollutant and avoiding nuisance caused to the nearby residents in connection with her application for renewal of SPL, the EPD refused the renewal application of the CBP on April 29, 2021. The CBP then lodged an appeal to the Appeal Board formed under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance on May 18, 2021. According to the Air Pollution Control (Specified Processes) Regulations, the CBP may still continue to operate in accordance with the original licence conditions until the appeal is disposed of, withdrawn or abandoned. The Appeal Board dismissed the appeal on January 27,

2022. Therefore, the CBP has to immediately cease carrying out of any specified process, including concrete production and related processes, in the plant. The EPD has also requested the CBP to clear all cementitious materials within 60 days.

Apart from increasing the number of inspections, the EPD will also adopt new technology such as drones to step up monitoring on some plants that have contravened conditions of SPLs. If contravention of licence condition or relevant environmental pollution control ordinance is found, the EPD will initiate prosecution provided that there is sufficient evidence. When vetting relevant application for licence renewal, the EPD will require the operator to implement more stringent control measures than the general situation, and will impose special conditions, such as installing two sets of independent and concurrently operating CCTV system in the CBP and sending the image to the EPD to enhance monitoring, as well as installing anti-spillage device to the chutes at tails of concrete trucks etc. Unless the applicant can demonstrate her capability to provide, install and effectively operate the necessary environmental protection measures, and establish an effective mechanism for monitoring and response, the EPD will refuse to renew the licence. The existing licensing system of specified process and the relevant ordinances have already conferred the necessary powers to the EPD, we have no plan to amend the ordinance at present. The EPD will continue to monitor the operation of the specified process and will review the effectiveness in due course.