

LCQ1: Recycling domestic food waste

Following is a question by the Hon Dennis Leung and a reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 12):

Question:

According to the report "Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong" by the Environmental Protection Department, food waste accounted for 34 per cent of domestic waste in 2022. There are views that the Government should step up domestic food waste recycling in a step-by-step manner having regard to the waste collection situation of various types of housing. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that the limited capacity and the frequent overflowing of the food waste smart recycling bins (FWSRBs) under the Smart Food Waste Recycling Programme (Public Rental Housing) are not conducive to developing a habit of food waste recycling among residents, whether the authorities will expedite the achievement of the target of "one FWSRB for each block" in public housing estates under the Housing Department and the Hong Kong Housing Society; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that and the difficulties involved;

(2) as it is learnt that under the Pilot Scheme on Food Waste Smart Recycling Bins in Private Housing Estates, the participation period for private housing courts is 28 months, and the FWSRBs allocated to them have to be returned at the end of the participation period, which has aroused concern about the sustainability of the Pilot Scheme, whether the authorities have plans to enhance the Pilot Scheme, so as to avoid the occurrence of a window period for the work of food waste recycling in private housing courts; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has plans to install additional food waste recycling facilities extensively in rural areas and districts with a high concentration of "three-nil" buildings, so as to help residents in such areas and districts to develop a habit of food waste recycling; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Currently, about 11 000 tonnes of municipal solid waste are generated in Hong Kong per day, of which around 30 per cent is food waste. Of the total amount of food waste, about 70 per cent are domestic food waste. The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) continues to expand the food waste collection network, with the number of collection points set up at public and private premises that generate larger quantities of food waste having increased substantially from around 170 in mid-2022 to over 1 100 at present.

Currently, the amount of food waste recycled in Hong Kong is increasing progressively, with an average daily recovery of around 270 tonnes in May this year, representing an increase of about 60 per cent compared to last year. On domestic food waste collection, the EPD has installed food waste smart recycling bins (FWSRBs) in over 90 per cent of the public rental housing (PRH) estates across the territory. It is expected that FWSRBs will be installed in all PRH estates in Hong Kong by July this year, which is one month ahead of the original schedule. In the coming year, the EPD will further enhance various domestic food waste collection measures by doubling the number of FWSRBs in PRH estates and private housing estates, setting up 100 food waste recycling spots, and establishing food waste recycling points at about 100 refuse collection points (RCPs) for use by the general public and restaurants. The reply to the question raised by the Hon Dennis Leung is as follows:

(1) The EPD, in collaboration with the Housing Department (HD) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HS), launched the Trial Scheme on Food Waste Collection in PRH Estates in late October 2022. The FWSRBs equipped with overflow prevention and odour abatement devices are used to collect food waste to maintain environmental hygiene, and GREEN\$ rewards are provided to encourage residents' participation. The EPD has so far installed a total of 698 FWSRBs in over 90 per cent (i.e. 197) of PRH estates across the territory. The EPD is expected to complete the installation of over 700 FWSRBs in 213 PRH estates (a total of approximately 1 500 blocks) in Hong Kong by July.

The FWSRBs adopted by the EPD are equipped with functions such as weight sensors and fill level sensors. When the inner bin reaches 70 per cent of its capacity, the system will automatically send a phone message reminding the cleansing staff to replace the inner bin. To support the implementation of the food waste collection programme in PRH estates, the EPD has provided additional resources to the HD for strengthening its manpower to enhance cleansing services in all participating PRH estates, including the replacement of inner bins fully loaded with food waste. To further expedite the replacement of inner bins, the EPD has established a new alert system. When there are abnormal operations with the FWSRBs, the system will automatically send messages to the management staff of the estate management office and its cleansing contractor, notifying the relevant teams for immediate follow-up. The EPD will also closely monitor the situation through the big data platform.

Currently, the EPD is in discussion with the HD and the HS concerning the preparatory work for installing additional FWSRBs in PRH estates with higher usage. It is expected that, before the fourth quarter of this year, additional FWSRBs will be provided at 55 participating PRH estates which have implemented the scheme with high usage. Moreover, the EPD will gradually increase the number of FWSRBs in PRH estates, with the goal of achieving "one FWSRB per PRH block" within two years.

(2) For private housing, the EPD supports the installation of FWSRBs in private residential buildings for collecting food waste through the Recycling Fund and the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF). At the end of last

year, the EPD also collaborated with the Environmental Campaign Committee to roll out the Pilot Scheme on FWSRBs in Private Housing Estates under which FWSRBs are provided for free, with installation and maintenance services covered, to private housing estates with over 1 000 households for a two-year period. The EPD is considering optimising the existing scheme to cover private housing estates with fewer than 1 000 households. In the financial year of 2024-25, we expect that over 400 FWSRBs will be put into service in private housing estates. To avoid any service vacuum, the EPD will also continue to support food waste recycling in relevant private residential buildings after the completion of the funded projects.

(3) The EPD has already installed FWSRBs at four GREEN@COMMUNITY facilities (including GREEN@SHAM SHUI PO, GREEN@EASTERN, GREEN@SAI KUNG and GREEN@SHA TIN) in proximity to residential areas for the use of residents who live in buildings without sufficient space to install food waste recycling bins (such as "three-nil" buildings). The first public food waste collection point set up at the wet market of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) also commenced operation at Lockhart Road Wet Market in April this year. In the coming year, the EPD will set up about 100 food waste recycling spots in various districts to provide night-time food waste collection services in the form of kerbside collection booths at fixed time and locations. Moreover, food waste recycling points will also be set up at about 100 RCPs of the FEHD for the use of nearby residents and restaurants. We will continue to explore the possibility of setting up more public food waste recycling points at suitable premises to provide more convenient recycling outlets for the public.

To promote food waste recycling in rural areas, in addition to the provision of traditional covered food waste recycling bins by the EPD, the ECF also subsidises the installation of FWSRBs and food waste pre-treatment facilities known as "Food TranSmarter" in rural villages. In addition, the EPD briefed the New Territories Heung Yee Kuk and Tuen Mun Rural Committee on the details of relevant food waste collection services in November last year and May this year respectively, and called for active participation from the rural committees and village representatives. If village representatives are interested in setting up food waste recycling bins at nearby RCPs in rural areas, the EPD will assist in exploring its feasibility with the FEHD.

Thank you, President.