

LCQ11: Water Safety Plan Subsidy Scheme

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

The Government announced in the 2019 Policy Address the introduction of the Water Safety Plan Subsidy Scheme (WSPSS) aiming to encourage private property owners and management agents to implement the water safety plan for buildings (WSPB) at their premises in order to further safeguard drinking water safety in buildings in Hong Kong. A total of \$440 million has been allocated to the WSPSS for five years, and it is envisaged to benefit about 5 000 eligible buildings. The scope covered by the WSPSS includes water safety risk assessment on the internal plumbing system of the building, formulation of the WSPB, and the provision of subsidies for the necessary maintenance works and measures for controlling the risks as identified by the water safety risk assessment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of buildings which have applied for joining the WSPSS and the amount of subsidies granted since the introduction of the WSPSS, together with a breakdown by District Council district and type of buildings;
- (2) how it assesses the water safety risks of the participating buildings under the WSPSS, and the effectiveness of the WSPSS in enhancing the level of drinking water safety in those buildings;
- (3) how it monitors whether the participating buildings under the WSPSS are in compliance with regular checking and maintenance for the internal plumbing system as required in the WSPB, as well as the relevant legislation and guidelines; and
- (4) whether it has reviewed the implementation of the WSPSS, and considered extending the term of the WSPSS or expanding its scale and scope to benefit more buildings; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been committed to ensuring that the quality of drinking water supplied by the Water Supplies Department (WSD) complies with the Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards. Notwithstanding that the water supplied by the WSD is safe to drink, its quality could be affected when entering the inside service of a building due to various factors, such as

drinking water tanks not being properly cleansed, stagnation of water in the inside service, use of inappropriate plumbing materials, etc. Hence, since 2017, the WSD has been actively promoting the implementation of the water safety plan for buildings (WSPB) by property owners and management agents in their buildings in accordance with the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) to safeguard drinking water safety. The WSPB provides a systematic and effective management framework for the inside service of a building, including conduction of risk assessments and implementation of corresponding control measures; regular surveillance, inspection and maintenance of the inside service, and regular audit and review of the WSPB.

In 2019, the Government earmarked \$440 million to launch the Water Safety Plan Subsidy Scheme (WSPSS) with the purpose of promoting the implementation of the WSPB in eligible private residential or composite (i.e. commercial and residential use) buildings by providing financial support. The WSPSS aims at providing subsidies to a maximum of about 5 000 eligible buildings within five years, and the amount of subsidy to be disbursed for each building is capped at \$310,000.

A reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) As of May 20, 2024, the WSD has received a total of 760 applications, of which 713 applications involving 1 636 buildings are eligible. Up to now, the WSD has issued Approval-in-Principle (AIP) Letters to 410 eligible applications, involving 959 buildings. For the remaining 303 eligible applications, the WSD is requesting the applicants to provide supplementary information for assessment and approval. The progress of assessing and approving the eligible applications received is tabulated according to District Council districts as follows:

District	Eligible applications received		Type of eligible applications received		Applications receiving AIP Letter	
	no. of case	no. of building	no. of single building	no. of estate (no. of building)	no. of case	no. of building
Sha Tin	36	191	2	34 (189)	24	124
Yau Tsim Mong	125	155	115	10 (40)	73	81
Tuen Mun	35	142	12	23 (130)	23	85
Yuen Long	42	142	26	16 (116)	27	88
Kwun Tong	43	121	22	21 (99)	26	81
Tai Po	38	111	18	20 (93)	17	42
Sham Shui Po	66	104	57	9 (47)	36	61
North	17	92	1	16 (91)	11	66
Eastern	59	87	47	12 (40)	33	42
Kwai Tsing	28	83	15	13 (68)	20	64

Central and Western	71	77	66	5 (11)	40	45
Kowloon City	47	71	41	6 (30)	22	28
Tsuen Wan	21	65	13	8 (52)	9	41
Sai Kung	11	56	1	10 (55)	6	27
Wong Tai Sin	19	50	9	10 (41)	10	28
Wan Chai	39	43	36	3 (7)	22	24
Southern	11	33	4	7 (29)	6	19
Islands	5	13	2	3 (11)	5	13
Total	713	1 636	487	226 (1 149)	410	959

After receiving the AIP Letter, an applicant can apply to the WSD for disbursement of subsidies in stages according to the progress of completion of various major items under the WSPSS, such as completion of the formulation of the WSPB, completion of the recommended rectification works, etc. The WSD will release the subsidy to the applicant after verifying relevant supporting documents. According to our latest estimate, those applications with an AIP Letter issued will involve a total subsidy of about \$250 million.

(2) According to WHO's recommendations, the WSPB adopts a risk-based, multi-barrier approach and includes the conduction of risk assessments and implementation of appropriate control measures, thereby helping property owners and management agents to effectively manage the inside service of their buildings. Buildings participating in the WSPSS are required to engage qualified persons (QPs) who have completed the WSPB training to perform water safety risk assessments for the inside service of the buildings. Based on the risk assessment results, QPs will recommend water quality tests and/or rectification works for the inside service to eliminate relevant safety risks and potential hazards.

Generally speaking, buildings that have not implemented the WSPB lack awareness of the potential contamination risks of their inside service, and consequently fail to formulate corresponding control measures in a timely manner. As a result, remedial measures are often carried out only after the drinking water quality has been found deteriorated, which poses risks to the hygiene and health of their occupants. In view of this, the WSD actively encourages owners and management agents to implement the WSPB, including the implementation and monitoring of risk control measures recommended by QPs, and to conduct regular audits to ensure the effective implementation of the WSPB, thereby improving the overall level of water safety of their buildings. On the whole, property owners and management agents participated in the WSPSS have maintained a very positive attitude towards the scheme and expressed that the financial support from the Administration has strengthened their determination to implement the WSPB for their buildings.

(3) While registered consumers and agents are responsible for the proper maintenance of the inside service according to the Waterworks Ordinance (Cap.

102) so that the water supply in the building will be free from contamination, the implementation of the WSPB is entirely voluntary, under which the water safety risk assessment and follow-up actions focus on managing and controlling water safety risks. After issuing the AIP Letters, the WSD will conduct inspections at the buildings concerned from time to time to verify the formulation and implementation of the WSPB by the applicants. In addition, when applying for disbursement of subsidies at each stage, applicants are required to provide supporting documents and reports on regular inspection and maintenance of the inside service in accordance with the WSPB for verification by the WSD.

(4) Since the launch of the WSPSS in 2019, the Development Bureau and the WSD have been reviewing its implementation regularly. Owing to restrictions brought by the COVID-19 epidemic and the related social distancing measures, it is understood that at that time, many applicants were unable to convene owners' meetings in a timely manner to pass the resolution for participating in the WSPSS. As a result, the number of applications for the WSPSS by now has not met our expectation.

After the epidemic, the WSD has launched a number of publicity and promotion activities through different channels since September 2022 to encourage property owners and management agents to participate in the WSPSS and assist them in applying for relevant subsidies, with the hope that more eligible buildings will join the WSPSS. Relevant publicity and promotion activities include deploying dedicated teams to contact eligible buildings, mailing circular letters to relevant occupiers for publicity; attending up to 70 management committees' or owners' meetings, and visiting 6 000 eligible buildings. The number of applications for and participation in the WSPSS has increased gradually since 2023. Taking into account the fact that there remains unspent funding under the WSPSS and the scheme is still open for applications, we have no plan at this stage to expand the scale and scope of the WSPSS.