

LCQ12: Recovery and repair works after typhoons

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

During its onslaught on Hong Kong last month, super typhoon Mangkhut caused extensive damage, which included damage to the structures on buildings' external walls, toppling of numerous trees, severe flooding in coastal areas and sports grounds sustaining serious damage. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the storm surges accompanying Mangkhut caused severe flooding and damage to a number of facilities in Heng Fa Chuen, whether the Government has studied measures for helping Heng Fa Chuen withstand storm surges accompanying super typhoons in future; if so, of the outcome of such studies; if not, whether it will conduct such studies immediately;

(2) as a huge amount of marine refuse (e.g. bits of foam plastics) was washed ashore by the storm surges accompanying Mangkhut, whether the Government knows the major sources of such refuse, and what measures it has put in place to reduce such kind of refuse at source;

(3) as the number of service orders for clearance of fallen trees received by some arboriculture companies after the typhoon had moved away from Hong Kong was five to 10 times more than usual but such companies did not have sufficient manpower to cope with the service demand, resulting in the handling of some cases, despite their urgent nature, having to be scheduled for next month, whether the Government has approached the arboriculture companies concerned to gain an understanding of the details of such cases; whether it has set a target completion date for the clearance work of fallen trees across the territory; of the government departments currently responsible for handling emergency clearance of fallen trees, and the proportion of outsourcing of such work by each of these departments;

(4) given that the Aberdeen Sports Ground was seriously damaged during the onslaught of super typhoon Hato in August last year, of the reasons why the relevant restoration works have not yet commenced so far, and when such works will commence and be completed; the expected completion time for the restoration works for Siu Sai Wan Sports Ground which has been damaged by Mangkhut; and

(5) given that after the onslaught of typhoons, government departments often need to rent lorry-mounted cranes from private companies to remove tottering structures (e.g. signboards) high on external walls of buildings and broken

branches of trees, whether the Government will purchase such type of vehicle so as to facilitate expeditious commencement of such clearance work after the onslaught of typhoons?

Reply:

President,

Government departments have been making all-out effort in the post-Mangkhut recovery work without delay. As the damages caused by Mangkhut were extensive, some repair works are still ongoing. The relevant departments will continue to follow up the situation.

I have consulted the relevant bureaux and departments and the consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan is as follows:

(1) When the super typhoon Mangkhut battered Hong Kong, the storm surge and huge waves caused by the typhoon brought seawater into Heng Fa Chuen and led to flooding. Based on the experience of handling super typhoon Mangkhut, the Government will review the feasibility of various flood prevention strategies and make various assessments, including practical effectiveness, technical feasibility, land restrictions and cost-effectiveness.

In respect of the damages caused at Heng Fa Chuen, the Civil Engineering and Development Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department and Architectural Services Department are examining the possibility and proposals of strengthening the wave prevention facilities in the playgrounds, for instance, to consider the installation of wave protection wall at the coastal planter areas of the playgrounds, with a view to enhancing the resistance to storm surge. With regard to the issue of flooding, the Civil Engineering and Development Department and Drainage Services Department will provide technical engineering advice to the estate management company of Heng Fa Chuen.

Civil Engineering and Development Department will conduct a comprehensive review of the situation of coastal low-lying or unsheltered areas. Studies on typhoon related storm surge and waves will also be conducted to assess how the extreme weather caused by climate change will affect the concerned areas. Relevant response and resilience measures can be formulated in accordance with the result of the studies, including engineering improvement and management measures.

(2) The Government understands that foam boxes and components are widely used in the delivery of goods that require thermal insulation or shock resistance, for instance, most of the refrigerated food products (meats, vegetables, fruits and seafood), packaging of fragile goods (electrical appliances and electronic devices), one-off utensils (meal box) and fisheries related products etc. We cannot ascertain the source of foams found in Heng Fa Chuen. The strong destructive power of super typhoon Mangkhut might have brought foams from different sources. Possible sources of foam fragments

include mari-culture rafts, fishponds and some fishing boats as they had suffered varied damages during the typhoon.

Seafood wholesaling uses foam boxes usually near the coastal areas. We have been in communication with the Fish Marketing Organization, which manages the wholesale fish markets, in order to manage the use of foam boxes. Foam boxes are generally recycled for carrying fish catches. The Fish Marketing Organization always reminds fishmongers and other fish market users to take appropriate measures, such as tying the foam boxes and placing them away from the shore, preventing the boxes from falling into the sea.

Various departments have implemented a wide array of measures under their purviews, including enforcement patrols and on-site monitoring, strengthening the clearance of marine refuse, promoting publicity and education activities, providing support measures and facilities to reduce waste from entering the marine environment. We will continue to communicate with the departments and strengthen the management on the use of foam boxes.

(3) The damages of Mangkhut to Hong Kong were extensive and unprecedented, causing collapses of trees which led to road blockages. The Highways Department accorded high priority to the swift resumption of traffic, and has deployed a large number of manpower from their contractors, including workers and machinery operators, to handle the emergency recovery and repair works in the major thoroughfare, district streets, cycling tracks and roadside slopes. Of major importance was to clean up the collapsed trees and debris that blocked the road expeditiously, so as to restore normal traffic as soon as possible. As a result, all major thoroughfare and roads leading to/from bus depots were reopened on September 18. The remaining roads blocked by fallen trees were also cleaned and re-opened on or before September 22. The relevant clearance operations were carried out by workers employed by the contractors, but not workers employed directly by the Highways Department.

For public areas other than the abovementioned major thoroughfare and roads, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and Home Affairs Department have also enhanced their manning, deploying staff and contractors to clean up fallen trees under their purviews in full strength, with priority accorded to blocked carriageways, pedestrian pavements, and potentially dangerous trees to reduce public risks and inconvenience. The Government has also deployed workers to check the health of trees and arranged measures to alleviate risks, including tree supporting, pruning and cleaning. The clearance of fallen trees with lower risk and not affecting the public are in progress.

(4) Siu Sai Wan Sports Ground was battered by Typhoon Mangkhut. Major facilities inside the venue including the power supply installation, covers of the spectator stands, field tracks and grass pitches, etc were severely damaged. In view of public safety, the Sports Ground is now temporarily closed. Following deliberation with the Architectural Services Department, the enhancement works for the covers of the spectator stands originally scheduled in the first quarter of 2019 will be conducted earlier, together with the reparation works of the grass pitches and enhancement works of the

outer perimeter fencing for the purposes of mitigating the damages caused by flooding. The Sports Ground is expected to be re-opened in mid-2019.

Concerning the Aberdeen Sports Ground, some covers of its west spectator stand were destroyed after typhoon Hato in August 2017. With reinforcement by the works departments, the damaged stand was reopened in November 2017. However, the stand was damaged again by typhoon Mangkhut and emergency demolition was required. The demolition work has been generally completed. Pending inspection by works departments on affected running tracks and upon completion of the recovery work, the sports ground is expected to be re-opened in November 2018. Works departments are following up the situation and arranging a new cover for the west spectator stand.

(5) The government fleet currently consists of crane lorries or grab lorries managed and used by various government departments. The Government Logistics Department also arranges service contracts for the hiring of grab lorries for the use by various departments. Departments can put up requests for the purchase of such vehicles or arrange vehicle hiring service on their own to meet their operational needs with reference to the experience drawn from super typhoon Mangkhut.

Take the Buildings Department as an example. The contractors employed by the department, as enshrined in the contract, must be able to provide a certain number of crane lorries at any time for emergency works. Drawing reference from the experience in the handling of super typhoon Mangkhut, the Buildings Department will request the contractors to provide more mobile crane machinery in future contracts, so as to enhance the emergency service efficiency.