

LCQ13: Reduction, recovery and recycling of waste textiles

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (March 18):

Question:

Some environmentalists have relayed that at present, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has not actively promoted the reduction, recovery and recycling of waste textiles (including used clothes and other used textile products). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the disposal quantity and recovery rate of waste textiles, and (ii) the quantity and percentage of waste textiles recovered through the Community Used Clothes Recycling Bank Scheme under the Home Affairs Department, in each of the past five years; if such figures are unavailable, whether the Government will gather them;

(2) whether the EPD has set targets on (i) the quantity of reduction, (ii) the recovery rate and (iii) the recycling rate in respect of waste textiles; if so, of the details and the specific measures taken to achieve such targets; if not, whether the EPD will set such targets;

(3) of the respective numbers of applications for subsidies made to the Environment and Conservation Fund (i) received and (ii) approved by the authorities in each of the past five years in respect of used clothes recovery projects, and the total amount of subsidies granted;

(4) as waste textiles currently are not the major waste items to be recovered under both the Community Recycling Network and the Community Green Stations, whether the EPD will consider including waste textiles in these two programmes or other programmes implemented by the EPD;

(5) whether the EPD will (i) collaborate with educational bodies to set up used clothes recovery boxes and organise recovery activities in schools, so as to increase the recovery quantity of waste textiles and enhance community engagement, and (ii) provide education and services relating to repairing clothes and recycling of used textile products, so as to encourage members of the public to reduce waste at source; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether the EPD has put in place new measures to encourage more non-profit making organisations and community groups to take part in the recovery of used clothes, so as to promote community-wide participation?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan is as follows:

Among the municipal solid waste (MSW) generated in Hong Kong, food waste, waste paper and waste plastic have accounted for more than 75 per cent of the total quantity. The waste reduction strategy of the Government is to put in more resources for reducing those wastes of larger quantities. To foster the environment-friendly culture of "use less, waste less" and enable green living to take root at the community level, the Government has been carrying out promotion of overall waste reduction through education and at the same time assisting local communities in the collection of various recyclables, including waste textiles.

While waste textiles account for only about three per cent of MSW, the Government is implementing the "Community Used Clothes Recycling Bank Scheme" (the Scheme) launched in 2006. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which participate in the operation of the "Community Used Clothes Recycling Banks" regularly collect donated used clothes. All of the collected clothes and revenue generated from them have to be used for charity purpose. The current Scheme Managers are Friends of the Earth (Hong Kong), Christian Action, the Salvation Army and the Conservancy Association. Apart from operating some of the banks by themselves, Scheme Managers have to allocate, in an open and fair manner, no less than 50 per cent of the banks to other organisations, so as to encourage more NGOs to participate in the recycling of used clothes. At present, 192 "Community Used Clothes Recycling Banks" are placed at appropriate locations in all districts under the Scheme.

The Government has established a Community Recycling Network across the territory. Through a wide range of recycling programmes and environmental education activities, the Network's Community Green Stations (CGSs) encourage public participation in waste separation for recycling as well as reuse of suitable second hand items. They also disseminate messages of at-source waste separation and clean recycling. To promote a "use less, waste less" lifestyle, swap and charity donation events are held from time to time by the CGSs to encourage proper use of resources, including used clothes.

Currently, quite a number of organisations in the community are providing clothing reuse services such as consignment service, online auctions and swap parties for used clothes. In recent years, some large fashion houses even provide shopping discounts for customers bringing in used clothes for recovery. Relevant information may be obtained via the Environmental Protection Department (EPD)'s website on waste reduction (www.wastereduction.gov.hk). The public may also make use of the EPD's "Hong Kong Second Hand Exchange" platform to exchange used clothes to avoid wastage.

On funding support, the Government has set up a \$1 billion Recycling Fund to assist in upgrading the operational capabilities and efficiency of

the recycling industry. This can help spur the sustainable development of the industry, thereby promoting waste recovery and recycling as well as turning waste into resources. A total of about HK\$ 4.38 million has been granted under the Recycling Fund for two projects concerning, among others, the recovery of used clothes.

Three funding applications on upcycling of clothing were received under the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) in the past five years. The applicants proposed to upcycle the used clothes into cloth bags, cloth dolls, pet clothing, accessories, etc. However, these funding applications were not supported as the proposals were considered not as good as other funding applications. In 2017, a total of HK\$ 2.36 million was approved under the ECF for three projects for the collection of resources/recyclables in the community. Apart from collection of common recyclables, the three projects also provide reuse, recycling and upcycling outlets for recyclables including used cloth.

The disposal quantity at landfills and recovery rate of textile waste between 2014 and 2018 are tabulated as below while compilation of relevant waste statistics for 2019 is underway:

| | | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------------------------|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Textile waste (Note 1) | Disposal quantity at landfills (tonnes) | 107 000 | 112 000 | 126 000 | 135 000 | 143 000 |
| | Total quantity recovered (tonnes) (Note 2) | 4 200 | 4 800 | 4 200 | 3 000 | 6 400 |
| | Recovery rate (%) | 3.8% | 4.1% | 3.3% | 2.2% | 4.3% |

Note 1: Among the textile waste, about 50 per cent was non-clothing waste including towels, handkerchiefs, cloth dolls, cloth bags, quilts, towel blankets, cloth carpets and flat sheets, etc while the rest were clothing such as inner and outer clothes, scarfs and gloves.

Note 2: Including the quantity recycled locally and exported for recycling, but not including the quantity of direct reuse through community activities such as "exchange of goods", consignment service and online auctions for used clothes.

The quantity of used clothes collected under the Community Used Clothes Recycling Bank Scheme managed by the Home Affairs Department between 2014 and 2019 are tabulated as below:

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Quantity collected under the Scheme (tonnes) | 503 | 492 | 608 | 713 | 762 | 835 |