

LCQ14: Implementation of the Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

The Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (the Scheme) has been in operation since August 1 this year. Under the Scheme, sellers are required to provide free removal service when they sell a new item of regulated electrical equipment (i.e. air-conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, computers, printers, scanners and monitors) to members of the public. However, quite a number of members of the public have relayed to me that the recycling service operator commissioned by the Government to collect waste electrical equipment (the operator) has failed to meet its performance pledge of collecting such equipment door-to-door within three working days upon receipt of a service request from sellers, with the waiting time even exceeding ten days in some cases. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of vehicles and manpower under the operator for providing the recycling service;
- (2) whether it knows the average number of items of waste electrical equipment collected daily by the operator since the implementation of the Scheme;
- (3) of the number of licence applications for regulated e-waste disposal (including storage, treatment, reprocessing or recycling of e-waste) received, approved and rejected by the Government so far; if it has rejected some applications, of the reasons for that;
- (4) of the respective numbers of complaints against the operator and sellers received by the Government since the implementation of the Scheme, and the number of complaints about the disposal of waste electrical equipment on the street;
- (5) as it has been reported that since the operator's plant for storing waste electrical equipment is full, the operator has been provided a land on loan by the Government for temporary storage of waste electrical equipment, of the relevant details; whether the operator has breached the contractual requirements by failing to dispose of waste electrical equipment properly;
- (6) given that the operator has failed to meet its performance pledge,

whether the Government will consider reviewing the current mode of commissioning an operator and switching to commissioning multiple recyclers and granting subsidies to them according to the quantity of waste electrical equipment they have collected; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(7) given that the operator turns waste electrical and electronic equipment into materials of value (such as plastics and metals) through processes such as detoxification, dismantling and recycling, of the outlets for such materials and the receiver of the income so generated (if any)?

Reply:

President,

The Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), or in short WPRS, came into effect on August 1, 2018. It covers air-conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, computers, printers, scanners and monitors (collectively referred to as regulated electrical equipment, or REE). The WPRS marks another important milestone in Hong Kong's waste reduction and recycling efforts, as WEEE generated locally that would have been otherwise exported for disposal or sent to the landfills are now collected and recycled properly into resources.

Currently, an REE seller is required by law to arrange for its customer a statutory free removal service to collect a used equipment of the same class abandoned by the customer. Upon purchase of the REE item, the customer is entitled to ask the seller to arrange for delivery of the new item and removal of the used item on the same day at no extra charge. REE sellers may provide the statutory free removal service on their own or through other collectors. If a seller opts for the service provided by the operator of the Government's WEEE Treatment and Recycling Facility (WEEE·PARK), i.e. ALBA-IWS, the operator will, after receipt of a service request from the seller, collect the waste equipment three working days from the date of sales as requested by the customer. For instance, if a customer purchases a new item on Monday, the seller may arrange for delivery of the new item and the operator's removal of the used item on the same day on Thursday.

Since its initial operation in October 2017 and up to the end of September 2018, the WEEE·PARK has processed over 6 900 tonnes of WEEE in total, well exceeding the target amount for its first year of operation. The figure reflects that the scheme has initially achieved its objective.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan is as follows:

(1) and (2) The total number of staff currently employed by ALBA-IWS is around 190. Using the combination of its own fleet, outsourced vehicles and in collaboration with relevant industry stakeholders, the operator's logistics team deploys resources flexibly to meet the demand for collection services. Since the implementation of the WPRS, ALBA-IWS handles around 900 collection orders on average on each working day.

(3) As at October 21, 2018, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has issued a total of five waste disposal licences for e-waste (e-WDLs), with another 12 applications being processed. There were another six applications deemed invalid or withdrawn by the applicants because of non-conforming land uses or the operations concerned being within the scope of exemption under the legislation.

(4) From the implementation of the WPRS on August 1 up to October 21 this year, the EPD has received a total of 57 complaints, of which 33 involved REE sellers, 19 were on the operator's services and five of general nature. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) does not keep separate statistics on complaints about the disposal of WEEE on streets. However, according to FEHD, their frontline staff did not observe any major change in the number of waste REE found at refuse collection points before and after the implementation of WPRS.

(5) The WEEE·PARK is a government facility and its operator provides collection and treatment services under the WPRS. As the service demand at the initial implementation stage of the WPRS exceeded the projected demand, the EPD has made available some vacated places in the Kowloon Bay Waste Recycling Centre, which has ceased operation and is to be demolished, as a short term measure, for the temporary storage of WEEE collected from the public to be transferred to WEEE·PARK for treatment. There was no breach of the contractual requirement on the part of the operator in relation to this short term measure.

(6) Following adjustments made after the initial period, the scheme has been operating smoothly in general. The operator has been able to collect the waste equipment from customers three working days after receipt of the service requests. Only in certain special circumstances (less than 0.1% of the cases), the operator might take longer time to arrange for the collection, for instance, from more remote locations in the outlying islands due to the need to accommodate the conveyor schedule. In terms of treatment performance, as mentioned above the actual quantity processed by the operator up to the end of September has exceeded its target quantity for its first year of operation. There is no question of the operator being unable to meet the contractual requirements.

The design capacity of the WEEE·PARK is about 30 000 tonnes per year, which is roughly half of the amount of waste REE generated in Hong Kong every year. There is room for existing and potential recyclers to participate in the market for treating waste REE. If necessary, the WEEE·PARK may increase its capacity by arranging an additional shift in the operation of the facility to cope with the demand. As mentioned above, up to October 21 this year, the EPD has issued a total of five e-WDLs, with another 12 applications being processed. We encourage licensed recyclers to take part in the recycling and treatment of waste REE. We will also continue to keep abreast of the market development to ensure that the overall handling capacity locally is adequate to underpin the implementation of the WPRS.

(7) Under the contract, the Government will determine and pay the operator the operation fee calculated based on the actual weight of WEEE collected and treated. The operator will properly separate and remove small amount of harmful substances such as heavy metal (e.g. mercury, lead) and greenhouse gases from WEEE by using advanced technologies and equipment. Other parts of WEEE will be dismantled and shredded, followed by safe sorting and screening procedures to turn them into sorted plastic and metal materials of high quality for reuse in other industrial productions. The remaining small amount of waste that cannot be recycled or reused will be sent to the landfills or other EPD recognised treatment facilities for proper handling. Any income or expenditure arising from the disposal of such recyclables and waste is borne by the operator in full.