

LCQ14: Water dispensers in government venues

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (November 14):

Question:

Since the beginning of this year, the automatic vending machines in government venues have ceased to sell plastic bottled drinking water measuring one litre or less. In addition, the Chief Executive announced in the Policy Address she delivered last month that the Government would install more water dispensers in government venues, with a view to reducing waste at source. Nevertheless, it has been reported that *Escherichia coli* and *Staphylococcus aureus* were detected in some water samples taken from the water dispensers in venues managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, arousing public concern about the quality of water from the water dispensers in government venues. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has established any mechanism for providing sufficient water dispensers in government venues according to the number of users of the venues concerned; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(2) whether it has issued guidelines to require various government departments to arrange, in respect of the water dispensers in the venues under their management

(i) regular maintenance and repairs to ensure the proper functioning of such water dispensers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(ii) regular water quality tests to ensure that the drinking water from such water dispensers meets hygiene standards; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been leading by example in adopting various waste reduction measures. For the convenience of the public and to promote environmental protection by encouraging members of the public to bring their own reusable water bottles, the Government has provided water dispensers mainly in active recreational facilities managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, such as sports centres, sports grounds and swimming pools, etc. Since February 2018, sale of plastic bottled water measuring one litre or less has been progressively ceased in automatic vending machines in government venues. To further inculcate the "bring your own bottle" culture and reduce the consumption of plastic bottled water, the Chief Executive has

announced in the 2018 Policy Address that the Government will install more water dispensers in government venues with public access. The initial target is to install 500 water dispensers in three years, increasing the total number of water dispensers serving the public in government venues to 3 200 units.

The following is our reply, after consultation with relevant bureaux and departments, to the Hon Yiu Si-wing's question:

(1) In providing water dispensers for public use, the main considerations of government departments are their operational needs and the specific physical situation of individual venues, rather than the number of users of the venues. Relevant works departments would assist departments that managed government venues to apply for funding upon their requests, and install water dispensers in new government venues and suitable existing government venues, subject to the actual circumstances and technical feasibility. For the 500 new water dispensers mentioned in the 2018 Policy Address, the Government would accord higher priority in installing them in existing government venues with public access and where the flow of people is high.

(2) (i) and (ii) Drinking water provided by water dispensers in government venues usually comes from tap water or water bottles.

The quality of the water supplied to the connection point at the building/lot boundary by the Water Supplies Department (WSD) conforms with the Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards (namely the Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality recommended by the World Health Organization). To ensure that the water is safe to drink, works departments will install water dispensers and plumbing installations in accordance with the guidelines issued by the WSD and relevant legislative requirements, including Practice Guide on Carrying Out Plumbing Works and Waterworks Ordinance etc; and obtain prior approval from the WSD before putting the water dispensers into service. These water dispensers are generally equipped with filter cartridge/ UV sterilisers to ensure that the water is hygienic. Government departments that managed government venues would undertake regular maintenance, such as inspections and replacement of filter cartridge and UV sterilisers, and clean the water dispensers in accordance with the manufacturers' guidelines so as to ensure water supplied from water dispensers is hygienic without the need for water quality tests. Besides, the correct use of water dispensers by users is very important. According to the Department of Health's advice, when using water dispensers, users should avoid contacting their mouthpiece and protective guard; should not spit on them or wash hands with them to avoid contaminating the water dispensers.

As regards bottled water, government departments procure them under bulk purchase contract arranged by the Government Logistics Department. The contract has stipulated that the bottled water must comply with all the applicable legislation and standards in Hong Kong, including the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance and Microbiological Guidelines for Food. The supplier must conduct regular water sampling tests to ensure water safety. User government departments would arrange regular maintenance and cleansing for the water dispensers in accordance with the manufacturers'

guidelines.

In case site staff of government venues spot any problems with the water dispensers such as fault, damage, rust, abnormal operation, etc, they would report to the works departments for follow up. The relevant works departments would also conduct regular inspections of water dispensers to ensure that they function properly.