

LCQ16: Contingency response mechanism

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (June 23):

Question:

On the evening of the 2nd of this month, a No. 3 alarm fire broke out on a cargo vessel loaded with waste metals and located in the waters south of Tsing Yi. The fire was not extinguished until around 8am on the following day. The Fire Services Department published a posting on a social media platform five hours after the fire had broken out, reminding "coastal residents in the nearby districts that they may be affected by the smoke and odour carried away by the wind; such residents may close the doors and windows for the time being and stay calm". It has been reported that during the fire, hundreds of thousands of residents were affected by the smoke and odour, and quite a number of them were panic-stricken and had nowhere to turn to for assistance. On the other hand, the emergencies as defined under the Government's Emergency Response System do not include a fire that causes widespread impacts. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) apart from the aforesaid posting, of the details of the relevant information disseminated by the Government to the public during the said fire, including the policy bureaux/government departments (B/Ds) disseminating such information, the time when and the channel through which such information was disseminated, as well as whether such information included methods provided for the affected members of the public to cope with the smoke and odour;
- (2) whether, during the said fire, it sent staff to the affected districts to explain to the members of the public the origin of the smoke and odour, advise them on the methods for coping with the smoke and odour, and call on them to stay calm; if so, of the respective numbers of departments and staff members involved; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether an inter-departmental contingency response mechanism has been put in place to handle incidents which cause widespread impacts but are not classified as emergencies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it has reviewed the performance of the various B/Ds in responding to the said fire (including their vigilance and initiative), and formulated measures to ensure that when similar incidents happen in the future, they will disseminate relevant information to the public in a timely manner?

Reply:

President,

In response to Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung's questions, the reply is as follows:

(1) and (2) Regarding the cargo vessel fire incident on June 2 evening, the Fire Services Department reported the case through the media and its Facebook Page, advising the public affected by the smoke to close their doors and windows for the time being as well as to stay calm. From 9pm to 2am that night, the concentrations of suspended particulates recorded at Kwai Chung and Sham Shui Po monitoring stations of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD)'s air quality monitoring network increased to higher levels for a few hours, then gradually fell to normal levels. Despite the increase in suspended particulates concentrations, the peaks did not exceed the highest levels recorded in the past and they only lasted for a few hours. The 24-hour average concentrations did not exceed the relevant air quality objectives either. The concentrations of other pollutants remained relatively low that night. Therefore, the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) remained at Low to Moderate levels and the EPD had not issued another warning about serious air pollution. It should be noted that if the AQHI reaches or is forecast to reach 10+ (i.e. "Serious" category), the EPD will issue a warning about serious air pollution to the public.

(3) and (4) The Government departments will review incident response measures from time to time and make adjustments if necessary. For this incident, the relevant departments will review the arrangements for releasing public information in similar incidents and the room for improvement, with a view to enhancing the efficiency of information dissemination and the quality of service provision.