

LCQ18: Coloured water sprayed by specialised crowd management vehicles

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chi-chuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

It has been reported that on October 20 this year, the coloured water sprayed by a specialised crowd management vehicle (commonly known as "water cannon vehicle") operated by the Police when dispersing demonstrators hit 10-odd members of the public and reporters outside the entrance of the Kowloon Mosque. Some of them felt unwell (e.g. temporary loss of sight, burning sensation on the skin) and sought medical consultation, but the doctors were unable to prescribe the right treatment as they were unclear about the composition of the coloured water. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of persons since August 1 this year who sought consultation at public hospitals because their bodies had been stained with the coloured water sprayed by water cannon vehicles and, among them, the number of those admitted to hospitals for treatment;
- (2) of the respective names and concentrations of (i) the pigments (ii) the Oleoresin Capsicum jet pack solution, (iii) the adhesives and (iv) other chemicals in the coloured water sprayed by water cannon vehicles; the respective manufacturers and places of origin of such chemicals;
- (3) whether it will consider providing all private hospitals, public hospitals and private clinics in Hong Kong with information on the composition of the coloured water as well as the recommended treatment protocols for persons stained with coloured water, so that such persons may receive appropriate treatment; if so, of the details, if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) how persons stained with coloured water can effectively and quickly remove on the spot the coloured water on their bodies in order to alleviate the injuries?

Reply:

President,

The Government appeals to the public to express their demands in a peaceful and rational way, to embody democracy under the principles of tolerance and respect, and to uphold the rule of law by lawful and reasonable means.

The Police have a statutory duty to maintain law and order. When public order and safety are severely threatened by incidents such as illegal road blockage, paralysed traffic, unlawful assemblies and violent charging of police cordon lines, etc., the Police will take appropriate actions after risk assessment to maintain law and order. Specialised Crowd Management Vehicles is an equipment used to disperse crowd, the purpose of which is to stop people from gathering or committing illegal acts.

In consultation with the Security Bureau and the Hospital Authority (HA), my consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Chi-chuen is as follows:

According to the Police's information, the colourant used in the specialised crowd management vehicles is non-toxic. It will not cause bodily harm and will not pose risks to public health. When using the specialised crowd management vehicles, the Police may also add in pepper based solution having regard to actual needs in order to stop illegal acts. The main effect of pepper based solution is similar to pepper spray. Exposure to pepper based solution will cause one to have a burning sensation of the skin and discomfort in the eyes. Anyone who is exposed to pepper based solution should leave the scene immediately, and wash thoroughly with large amount of water in a ventilated place, in order not be posed to health risks.

According to the HA, there were cases where people attended the accident and emergency (A&E) departments of the HA due to discomfort after exposure to blue liquid sprayed by specialised crowd management vehicles. Those who were exposed to blue liquid generally experienced mild respiratory and skin irritation, and there was no serious health impact reported. Most of them could be immediately discharged after rinsing and receiving treatment at the A&E departments. Decontamination facilities are available at all 18 A&E departments of the HA for treating patients who have been exposed to biochemical/hazardous substances. Healthcare personnel are also experienced in treating these cases. The HA does not maintain statistics of relevant attendances.

The Police have been sourcing globally for safe and suitable equipment and ammunitions in accordance with the established procedures to meet operational needs. As the procurement details of the equipment used by the Police involve operational deployment, it is inappropriate for disclosure to avoid affecting the Police's operational capability.

The Government reiterates that if the public can express their views in a peaceful and rational manner, the Police do not need to use any force. The Police have been committed to safeguarding the public safety and public order of Hong Kong. We hope that members of the public would understand this.