

LCQ18: Littering problem in the countryside

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Pierre Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 26):

Question:

It has been reported that quite a number of members of the public turned to the country parks and hiking trails for recreation and amenity since they could not travel abroad and some of the cultural, recreational and sports facilities had been closed amid the epidemic, thus aggravating the problem of littering in such places. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether litter collection in the various country parks and hiking trails is undertaken by the staff of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) or the staff of outsourced service contractors (contractors) engaged by the AFCD; of the number of persons carrying out such work in each month of the past three years;
- (2) of the respective average (i) monthly and (ii) daily frequencies of litter collection carried out by the AFCD and/or its contractors in the various country parks and hiking trails in the past three years; if such figures are unavailable, whether it will compile such statistics;
- (3) of the respective numbers of visitor arrivals to the various country parks and hiking trails as well as the quantities of litter collected therein, in each month of the past three years; if such figures are unavailable, whether it will compile such statistics;
- (4) whether the AFCD will increase the frequency of and the manpower for litter collection in the various country parks and hiking trails, and step up law enforcement actions against littering in such places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) given that the Government has reduced the numbers of litter bins and recycling bins in the various country parks in recent years to encourage visitors to "take their litter home with them", whether the Government has reviewed if such an arrangement has aggravated littering by visitors in the country parks; if it has reviewed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the details; if the review outcome is in the negative, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government notices that there have been a considerable number of

members of the public visiting country parks and other countryside areas since the epidemic last year. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has stepped up patrol and litter cleaning efforts in country parks (including hiking trails and recreational sites) where there are more visitors. It has also been promoting the messages of keeping the environment of country parks clean and caring for the nature to visitors through various channels.

Our reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Chan is as follows:

(1) Litter collection in country parks (including hiking trails within country parks) is carried out by the AFCD staff and their cleaning service contractors in their respective responsible areas. As collection and disposal of litter in country parks form part of the AFCD's regular management work for country parks, there is no breakdown of the staff involved in such services. Meanwhile, the number of cleaning service contractor workers involved is about 140 each year. In addition to litter collection in country parks, they are also responsible for cleaning of related facilities such as toilets.

(2) and (3) The collection and disposal of litter in country parks form part of the AFCD's regular management work for country parks, which would be adjusted according to the actual needs in different locations. Consequently, there would be variations on the services and the AFCD does not compile statistics specifically on the daily and monthly frequency of litter collection in individual country parks and hiking trails. On the other hand, the AFCD would flexibly increase the frequency of litter collection in the light of the utilisation and hygiene conditions of the sites, particularly for those more popular with visitors. There are cleaning service contractor workers stationed at highly popular recreational sites to carry out the cleaning work. In addition, after long holidays and weekends, the AFCD would also flexibly deploy additional manpower to popular hiking trails to step up litter collection.

Over the past three years, the number of visitors and the amount of litter collected in all country parks in Hong Kong for each month are tabulated in Table 1 and Table 2 in Annex respectively. As many country parks in Hong Kong are geographically connected or very close to each other, it is difficult to clearly define which individual country parks the visitors have visited and from which the litter has been collected. Therefore, the department does not have the monthly breakdown of the visitor number and the amount of litter collected for individual country parks.

(4) Since the epidemic last year, the AFCD has been deploying resources agilely on litter collection in country parks by increasing the frequency and manpower of such services subject to the actual situation in popular locations and after long holidays or weekends, and stepping up litter cleaning effort along popular hiking trails and recreational sites.

In addition, the AFCD is committed to combating illegal activities in country parks so as to protect the natural environment. The AFCD staff conduct patrols in country parks and special areas in various districts to

monitor the ground situation and visitors' utilisation of related facilities. If irregularities such as littering are detected, the AFCD will take enforcement actions against the persons involved under the Country Parks and Special Areas Regulations (Cap. 208A) and other relevant legislation.

In the light that many members of the public have visited country parks since the epidemic last year, the AFCD has stepped up patrol and law enforcement at popular locations. The AFCD reviews and adjusts the patrol arrangements in country parks from time to time subject to the actual situation and arranges special operations at specific locations when necessary to combat the irregularities in country parks. Last year, the AFCD arranged 42 special operations. Verbal advice was given to country park visitors on keeping the environment clean and 77 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued against littering.

(5) The AFCD has been implementing the "Take Your Litter Home" publicity and education programme in collaboration with green groups and hiking groups since 2015, and has installed water filling stations in country parks. The programme enables public's participation in the protection of the countryside by nurturing their good habits of taking away their own litter after visiting the country parks and bringing their own reusable water bottles.

To tie in with the relevant publicity and education programme, litter bins and recycling bins along the hiking trails in country parks were removed by end of 2017 while there are still litter collection facilities at recreational sites (e.g. barbecue sites and campsites) for use by members of the public if needed. Although all barbecue sites and campsites in country parks are temporarily closed during the epidemic, in view of the increased number of visitors recently, the AFCD has adjusted the cordoned off area as needed to ensure that country park visitors could continue to use the litter collection facilities in some barbecue sites and campsites in order to maintain environmental hygiene. When patrolling the country parks, the AFCD staff would remind visitors to take away their litter and take appropriate enforcement actions against littering if detected.

The "Take Your Litter Home" publicity and education programme has been up and running for some time. It has been effective in enhancing the public awareness towards litter reduction and environmental conservation during their visits to the countryside. The overall amount of litter collected in country parks has been on a downward trend since 2017. The AFCD will continue to promote messages such as those related to hiking etiquette and caring for the nature through various channels from time to time as necessary.