

LCQ20: Compliance with the Water Pollution Control Ordinance by the catering industry

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

At present, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) regulates the discharge of wastewater from restaurants and food factories through the Water Pollution Control Ordinance (WPCO) (Cap. 358) and the relevant licencing system. A licence under WPCO (Licence) specifies, for compliance by the licensee, the effluent standards and relevant terms and conditions, including the quantitative limits on oil and grease in wastewater that may be discharged. For instance, restaurants and food factories are required to use grease traps to separate oil and grease from wastewater before discharging wastewater into communal sewers. The EPD has published a booklet entitled "Grease Traps for Restaurants and Food Processors" to help members of the catering industry understand and comply with the requirements of the licence. Some members of the catering industry have pointed out that some new technologies for oil and grease treatment have emerged in the market in recent years (e.g. grease separators, biological treatment and chemical treatment), which are more effective than the grease traps currently in use. As such new technologies are not mentioned in the EPD's guidelines and the aforesaid booklet, members of the industry are worried that the EPD may refuse to grant a Licence in respect of sewage treatment systems using those new technologies. This situation has restrained the application of such new technologies, rendering it impossible for the industry to reduce their operation costs and hindering the industry's development. In addition, members of the industry are unfamiliar with the law relating to sewage discharge and therefore rely heavily on the Government providing guidelines via the aforesaid booklet. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of enquiries about the Licence that the EPD received from members of the catering industry in the past five years, and the relevant follow-up actions;

(2) of the details of the EPD's law enforcement in the past five years regarding the compliance with the requirements under Cap. 358 by the catering industry (including the numbers of inspections conducted, complaints handled, prosecutions instituted and convicted cases); whether, in addition to taking law enforcement actions, the EPD has rendered support to members of the industry to assist them in complying with the relevant requirements;

(3) of the amount of resources allocated by the EPD in the past five years for the development of new technologies for treating the oil and grease in wastewater;

(4) when the EPD compiled the aforesaid booklet; when the booklet was being compiled by the EPD, of the criteria adopted and whether members of the public were consulted on its contents; whether the booklet has been amended or updated; if so, of the number of times for which amendments were made so far and the date on which amendments were last made; if not, whether the EPD will update the booklet on a regular basis to facilitate the promotion of new and effective oil and grease treatment technologies; if the EPD will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether the EPD organised any seminar in the past five years to promote new oil and grease treatment technologies to the catering industry; if not, of the channels through which the industry may learn of such new technologies?

Reply:

President,

Reply to the question raised by the Hon Steven Ho is as follows:

(1) Figures on the enquiries received by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) from members of the catering industry between 2014 and 2019 (as at November) regarding the licence granted under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance (WPCO) for the discharge of wastewater (Licence) are as follows:

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
						(as at November)
Enquiries	18	27	30	41	36	43

The enquiries mainly concerned whether a Licence would be required and the related application procedures. Upon receipt of enquiries from the catering sector, the EPD always explains in detail the particulars required for making applications and renders necessary assistance.

(2) Statistics on the EPD's enforcement actions taken under the WPCO in relation to the catering industry from 2014 to 2019 (as at November) are as follows:

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
						(as at November)
Inspections	1 823	1 598	1 897	1 696	1 653	1 587
Complaints	186	202	161	207	229	338

Prosecutions (Convictions)	5 (4)	10 (10)	6 (5)	3 (3)	3 (3)	7 (7)
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In addition to taking enforcement actions, the EPD officers will also brief restaurant operators on the legal requirements concerned during their inspections. Relevant information on environmental protection as well as the WPCO provisions will also be provided through various channels such as seminars, dedicated websites and information leaflets to facilitate the catering sector's access to necessary green information and guidelines on pollution control technologies. The relevant websites are as follows:

Green Restaurant:

www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/greenrestaurant/

Guidelines and References:

www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/greenrestaurant/guidelines/guidelines.html

When processing applications for a Licence, the EPD will not mandate the types of or technologies for the grease removal devices to be installed by the applicants. Having regard to their individual circumstances such as the quantity and quality of wastewater to be generated and the space available, as well as the corresponding treatment efficacy required, the applicants may select suitable grease traps or other grease removal devices/technologies, with a view to meeting the statutory effluent standards. Apart from the booklet on "Grease Traps for Restaurants and Food Processors" as mentioned in the question, the EPD also jointly prepared the "Environmental Guidebook for the Restaurant Trade" (the Guidebook) with the catering sector in 2002, covering practical green measures, latest technologies and management tips. New technologies on oil and grease treatment as mentioned in the question are also covered in the Guidebook, including the use of chemical coagulants, air flotation, and grease removal devices adopting biological agents and electro-coagulation. In recent years, certain newly developed grease removal devices (e.g. grease separators, biological treatment and chemical treatment) basing on the oil and grease treatment technologies introduced in the Guidebook have also emerged in the market to provide solutions to meet different requirements of the sector.

(3) Under the Recycling Fund, the Government supports the upgrading of the operational capabilities and efficiency of the recycling sector to promote the recovery, treatment and recycling of waste, including oil and grease in wastewater. The recycling sector is welcome to apply for subsidies under the Fund to develop new technologies for treating oil and grease in wastewater. Separately, if tertiary institutes and non-profit-making organisations are interested in conducting research and development projects in relation to new technologies for treating oil and grease in wastewater, they may also apply for funding through the Environmental Research, Technology Demonstration and Conference Projects under the Environment and Conservation Fund.

(4) To facilitate compliance with the WPCO by the catering sector, the EPD has prepared and disseminated various publicity posters, green information booklets, guidelines and leaflets. All these have been uploaded to the Green

Restaurant website, furnishing members of the sector with recommendations on and solutions to pollution control. As these materials are prepared for the purposes of reference and not policy-making, they are generally compiled in consultation or collaboration with the catering sector only, without any public consultation. The EPD duly updates the websites and information concerned to advise the sector on the latest green information and technologies. The booklet on "Grease Traps for Restaurants and Food Processors" as mentioned in the question was prepared by the EPD in 1996 with a view to meeting the needs of the majority of restaurants and eateries, taking into account factors such as the quality and quantity of wastewater generation, space available of the restaurants, efficacy of the treatment facilities, cost effectiveness, operation and maintenance requirements etc. Based on experience gained and feedback from the catering sector, the booklet was revised and supplemented in 1999 and 2000.

(5) Through regular participation in the bi-monthly Seminar on Restaurant Licensing organised by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the EPD delivers briefings and reference materials on relevant green information to the catering sector to facilitate their environmental compliance, including that with the WPCO requirements. Besides, the Green Restaurant website set up by the EPD also duly uploads and updates green information relating to the catering industry for its members' reference. To further enhance the sector's access to the latest pollution control equipment and technical support available in the market, the EPD has compiled the List of Environmental Pollution Control Equipment Suppliers/Contractors for the catering industry. The wastewater treatment facilities set out therein includes relevant devices such as grease traps. The List has been uploaded to the Green Restaurant website

(www.epd.gov.hk/epd/sites/default/files/epd/english/greenrestaurant/suppliers/files/sc_contractorlist_&_disclaimer_201906p.pdf).