

LCQ21: Coping with rodent infestation

Following is a question by the Hon Doreen Kong and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (July 13):

Question:

Recently, a resident of a private residential unit has complained to me that rodent infestation is serious in the building, affecting residents' daily lives. Moreover, some members of the public have relayed that rodent infestation in districts such as Kwun Tong and Ho Man Tin has spread from public housing estates (e.g. Oi Man Estate) to nearby shopping malls, seaside areas, turfed areas, streets, construction sites, etc. It is learnt that rodents also appear in commercial buildings. On coping with rodent infestation, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of the rodent infestation problem at public places such as seaside areas, turfed areas and streets, whether the Government has studied new ways to cope with such problem; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether it will conduct such a study immediately;

(2) in respect of the rodent infestation problem in different districts and different premises (e.g. private housing courts, public housing estates and commercial buildings), whether the Government has studied new ways to cope with such problem; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether it will conduct such a study immediately; and

(3) whether it has plans to promote an across-the-board adoption of the following rodent prevention measures in private and public residential buildings/premises:

(i) installing rodent meshes at drain openings to prevent rodents from crawling indoors, and

(ii) replacing gully gratings on streets (especially those streets in the vicinity of open-air markets) by drawing reference from the experience of installing gully gratings with steel plates in Model Housing Estate in North Point, so as to stop rodents from crawling out from gully inlets?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted relevant departments, the reply to the question raised by the Hon Doreen Kong is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Government attaches great importance to rodent control. Tackling the rodent problems successfully calls for a multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and community-wide approach, underpinned by collaborative

efforts by relevant bureau and departments (B/Ds) which carry out effective rodent prevention and control work in the premises under their purview. In this regard, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and relevant B/Ds have all along been adopting targeted anti-rodent measures at various premises.

The FEHD is responsible for rodent prevention and control in public places in general (including public streets, rear lanes and public places at the seashore) and provides guidelines, advice and training to relevant B/Ds. For general public areas, the FEHD conducts the routine anti-rodent work as well as two rounds of territory-wide and inter-departmental anti-rodent campaign and anti-rodent operations for designed target areas each year which last for 36 weeks in total. On top of these, the FEHD will allocate new resources to initiate the territory-wide night rodent control operations in all districts progressively, including forming the overnight rodent control teams and setting rodent traps in the small hours.

As for rear lanes, the FEHD has been conducting improvement work items proactively on rear lanes of public roads with the assistance of the Highways Department (including repairing surface channels and damaged road surfaces) in order to eliminate hiding places of rodents and block their dispersal routes, as well as setting up additional dedicated cleansing teams for stepping up its sweeping and washing efforts on rear lanes in various districts. Furthermore, the FEHD has also tightened the regulation of meat and poultry delivery to fresh provision shops since January 2022, and is now working on ways to ensure that food business licensees will handle waste generated from their premises properly for the prevention of rodent infestation. In the meantime, the FEHD will issue advisory letters to the food business premises (especially those connecting to rear lanes), reminding them of the need to store food and wash used utensils properly before the close of daily business, to take regular pest control measures, and to properly dispose of food remnants. The FEHD will continue to arrange territory-wide thematic operations to focus on combating relevant irregularities such as food preparation and scullery at rear lanes.

In respect of private premises, section 47 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) stated that it is the responsibility of owners or occupiers of private premises to perform disinfestation of vermin (including rodents) found in their premises. Depending on the actual situation, the FEHD will issue a notice requiring the owner or occupier of the premises to clean the premises and to destroy and remove any vermin within a specified time frame pursuant to section 47(1) of Cap. 132. The FEHD will also invoke section 126 of Cap. 132 to make application to the Magistrate's Courts for entry into private premises that are infested with vermin within a specified time; and may take reasonable steps to destroy or remove the vermin in the premises for protection of public health.

Besides, the Chief Executive announced on July 6, 2022 the establishment of the District Matters Co-ordination Task Force. The Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration will lead a number of B/Ds to enhance the overall environmental hygiene and cityscape in Hong Kong. The first phase of work is

to co-ordinate the launch of a three-month territory-wide clean-up campaign, the actions of which would help improve the rodent problems of the districts.

On the other hand, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) has all along been maintaining close communications and collaboration with the FEHD in respect of the environmental hygiene of the Public Rental Housing Estates (PRHEs). Where needed, the HA will invite the FEHD staff to conduct joint inspection in individual PRHEs, review the rodent prevention and control work and follow up the recommendations for improvement. The HA will continue to strengthen the community engagement through various publicity channels, carry out joint cleaning operations with local stakeholders and conduct pest control talks, etc, to encourage residents and shop tenants to participate in rodent prevention and control measures.

As for vacant land and grass lawns located in Government premises (e.g. leisure venues managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, unleased government land managed by Lands Department, etc), the relevant departments or their contractors will undertake suitable measures to prevent rodents at the relevant locations, such as placing rodent trappings, trapping and handling caught rodents.

To effectively tackle rodent infestation problems in different types of premises, it is necessary to take into account the specific characteristics of each premises (such as whether the concerned premises provides hiding places, dispersal routes and food sources, etc) and adopt targeted prevention and control measures. The FEHD and relevant B/Ds will continue to formulate targeted anti-rodent measures for different premises to enhance the effectiveness of the rodent control work.

(3) The FEHD and relevant B/Ds (including the Buildings Department and the Architectural Services Department) have been issuing guidelines on rodent prevention measures in public and private buildings to building professionals, registered contractors, property management companies, owners' corporations, etc, for reference. In particular, the FEHD issued "A Guide to Rodent Control for Building Management" (the Guide) in 2020, specifically reminding owners, owners' corporations and property management companies that rodents may make use of vertical pipes to reach entry points of pipes or their hiding places. The Guide also recommends feasible measures guarding against rodents from climbing the pipes, including the installation of metal rodent guards that are circular or in the form of an inverted funnel. Besides, the Guide recommends the installation of steel woven wire-cloths that meets the specifications underneath the grating of surface channels as a means to block rodent passage.

The FEHD has also provided guidelines on rodent prevention in PRHEs to the HA in 2020, which provides similar recommendations. The HA has also made reference to the guidelines concerned and reinforced the rodent proofing facilities in all PRHEs, including installing rodent guards at suitable locations of the external wall/pipe of buildings; placing metal meshes at the opening of ventilation facilities, sewage and vent pipes, surface drainage, etc, in order to prevent rodents from entering into the buildings and block

rodent passages and holes.

The FEHD and relevant B/Ds will continue to promote the adoption of effective rodent control measures in private and public buildings/premises. To further assist relevant departments and organisations in dealing with rodent infestation in their premises, the FEHD is compiling a code of practice and a checklist to departments, property management companies, owners' corporations, etc, with more guidance on the rodent control work.