

LCQ21: Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Pui-leung and a written reply by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, in the Legislative Council today (January 17):

Question:

To resolve district-based environmental hygiene and street management issues, the Government implemented the Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots (the Programme) in mid-August 2022, with the targets of (i) tackling 600-odd hygiene black spots and strengthening the cleansing of about 4 000 public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards; (ii) stepping up law enforcement; and (iii) enhancing public education and publicity. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the changes in the conditions of the hygiene black spots concerned since the implementation of the Programme, and set out the relevant information by District Council district;
- (2) whether it has gained an understanding of the causes of various hygiene black spots, as well as their impacts on environmental hygiene and cityscape; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) of the details of the Government's work in relation to the cleansing of public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards (including the specific data and the locations involved) since the implementation of the Programme; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the relevant work in the past year; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) whether it has conducted an assessment on the overall effectiveness of the Programme; if so, of the details (including the changes in hygiene conditions and the number of complaints); if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) as it is learnt that some hygiene black spots have revived after the Programme has been implemented for some time, of the new measures put in place by the authorities to follow up the situation concerned, so as to ensure that the effectiveness of the Programme is sustainable?

Reply:

President,

Our consolidated reply to the Hon Chan Pui-leung's question is as follows:

The current-term Government is committed to improving environmental hygiene and street management and putting a great emphasis on district-based environmental issues. The aim is to safeguard public health, build a liveable environment for citizens and boost our city's image. In this connection, the Chief Executive (CE) appointed the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration (DCS) in July 2022 to lead the District Matters Co-ordination Task Force for steering efforts of various bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to enhance the overall environmental hygiene and cityscape in Hong Kong, and to step up the cleansing intensity in public places and handle thorny environmental hygiene and street management issues at root. Among these efforts, the Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots (the Programme) launched in mid-August 2022 focuses on tackling environmental hygiene black spots and strengthening the cleansing of about 4 000 public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards.

In order to provide an additional channel for the public to report environmental hygiene issues on the district level, the Government further launched a thematic website of the Programme in January 2023. Providing a list of hygiene black spots in various districts across the city on an online map, the website enables citizens to compare the situation of these black spots before and after the Government's clearance operations, and to witness and monitor programme effectiveness, thereby enhancing the transparency of the Programme. Also, it facilitates citizens to provide feedback on listed black spots (including those which are deemed to have been rectified) or suggest new black spots for consideration by departments. Having received information (e.g. detailed addresses and photos) from the public via the website, departments will conduct on-site inspections, take follow-up actions and make responses. Once verified, newly reported black spots will be added to the list of hygiene black spots of the Programme. As at January 2024, the thematic website accumulated nearly 24 900 hits and collected about 1 560 public comments. Generally speaking, the environmental hygiene problems in majority of the newly reported spots are reviewed and concluded by departments as short-term and non-continuous, and could effectively be resolved with low chance of recurrence with cleansing and inspection efforts. Since the launch of the website, 32 newly reported spots in need of sustained attention have been added by departments to the list of black spots.

According to the feedback from different organisations and citizens, the number of listed hygiene black spots has increased from the initial 663 to 738. The updated number of black spots in each district (with a breakdown by District Council district) is as follows:

District Council district	At the start of the Programme	As at December 31, 2023
Central and Western District	65	66
Eastern District	22	24

Southern District	9	10
Wan Chai District	16	18
Kowloon City District	87	91
Kwun Tong District	24	26
Sham Shui Po District	26	31
Wong Tai Sin District	22	25
Yau Tsim Mong District	26	59
Islands District	58	60
Kwai Tsing District	10	15
North District	60	62
Sai Kung District	10	10
Sha Tin District	19	22
Tai Po District	134	135
Tsuen Wan District	23	23
Tuen Mun District	27	31
Yuen Long District	25	30
	663	738

With the concerted efforts and active facilitation of various departments, most black spots have improved in their hygiene conditions. The average number of comments collected monthly via the thematic website has decreased from over 240 in the first three months at the start of the Programme to about 70 in the latest three months. Such a decrease could help demonstrate that citizens recognise the improved conditions of hygiene black spots. Moreover, according to the review results of various departments in December 2023, hygiene conditions of more than 80 per cent of black spots have been significantly improved and these spots are suitable for removal from the list. In the 2022 Policy Address, the CE has set a key performance indicator (KPI) for the Programme, i.e. removing at least 75 per cent of environmental hygiene black spots by end-2023. In other words, our work in this regard has already met the target. However, as we need to nurture a new culture of keeping the environment clean and protecting the cityscape in Hong Kong, we do not intend to actually remove any hygiene black spots from the list at this stage despite the notable improvements in their environmental hygiene conditions. The departments concerned will sustain their efforts and closely monitor the hygiene conditions of these improved spots.

Regarding the cleansing of public places and clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards, the Government has all along attached great importance to signboard safety and adopted a multipronged approach to deal with unauthorised, dangerous or abandoned signboards under a "risk-based" principle. For signboards constituting obvious threats to life or property, the Buildings Department (BD) will take immediate enforcement actions. If signboards are abandoned or have become dangerous, irrespective of whether they are legal or not, the BD may order their removal by issuing Dangerous Structure Removal Notices to signboard owners in accordance with section 105

of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132). A total of 1 750 dangerous or abandoned signboards were removed/repared during the whole year of 2022, and another 1 780 from January to end-November 2023.

Under the new district governance structure, the Steering Committee on District Governance chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration will be responsible for taking a leading role on the overall strategy, specific policies and measures, work priorities and resource allocation of district governance, whereas the Task Force on District Governance (TFDG) chaired by the DCS will be responsible for steering and co-ordinating various B/Ds to carry out district work and implement corresponding policies and measures, and co-ordinating inter-departmental and/or cross-district issues as necessary. Under this structure, the District Matters Co-ordination Task Force has been revamped as the Working Group on Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape and put under the TFDG. Through the Working Group, the DCS will continue to lead the departments concerned to follow up on ongoing environmental hygiene work.

Apart from keeping a close watch over the latest situation of improvements in hygiene black spots and removal of dangerous or abandoned signboards, the TFDG and various departments will take appropriate measures to step up efforts in cleansing, inspections and law enforcement so as to achieve the goal of keeping the city clean in the long term. The Government has also conducted a comprehensive review on the existing statutory powers and penalties of environmental hygiene-related legislation to enhance its efficiency, effectiveness and deterrence in handling various thorny environmental hygiene problems. The legislative review has been implemented in two stages. The first-stage proposal on raising the fixed penalty and the maximum fines that may be imposed by the court for offences related to environmental hygiene and shopfront extension has come into effect since October 22, 2023.

The Government now proposes to amend the above-mentioned Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) and other related ordinances, supplemented by additional administrative measures, to enhance enforcement efficiency and deterrence, so as to achieve long-term improvements in the "longstanding, big and difficult" problems on environmental hygiene, public health nuisances and street management. The Government consulted the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene of the Legislative Council on the preliminary proposals on the second-stage legislative amendments in July 2023 and subsequently launched a two-month public consultation on November 21, 2023. We will earnestly listen to the community's views on the second-stage legislative amendment proposals before finalising them.