

LCQ22: Management of skips

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for the Environment, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 13):

Question:

In the light of the recommendations in Report No. 61 of the Director of Audit, the Environment Bureau leased out two sites last year, one adjacent to Tseung Kwan O Area 137 Fill Bank and another at Siu Lang Shui Road in Tuen Mun West, by way of short-term tenancies for use by the skips trade for storing skips. It has been reported that the utilisation rates of the two skip storage sites have been on the low side. As a result, the problem of unauthorised placement of skips on streets has not improved. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the design capacities for skips of the two aforesaid sites, and whether it knows the average numbers of skips stored daily and monthly thereat since they were leased out; whether the Government has plans to set aside other sites for storing skips; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) of the number and contents of the complaints about skips received by the Government in each of the past three years, as well as the number of warnings issued and the number of skips removed in respect of such cases; the average time lapsed from receipt of the complaints to removal of the skips by the Government, and set out the relevant figures by District Council district;
- (3) of the following information on the cases handled respectively by (a) the Lands Department and (b) the Police, in the past three years: (i) the respective numbers of cases in which skip operators were prosecuted and convicted, (ii) the average time lapsed from institution of prosecutions to conclusion of the cases, and (iii) the punishments generally imposed on the convicted persons;
- (4) of the number of traffic accidents involving skips in each of the past three years; the causes for such accidents and the resultant casualties;
- (5) as it was pointed out in the aforesaid Report that to tackle the problem of unauthorised placement of skips, the government departments concerned and the stakeholders were generally in support of introducing a permit system, of the details of the Government's work on the introduction of the permit system; and
- (6) given that the Guidelines for Mounting and Placing of Skips formulated by the Transport Department have no legal effect, whether the Government will consider regulating skip operation by way of legislation with a view to reducing traffic accidents caused by skips; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether the Government has more effective ways to

solve the problem of unauthorised placement of skips in the long run?

Reply:

President,

To follow up the recommendations made in Report No. 61 of the Director of Audit, the Government has set up a Joint Working Group on Management of Roadside Skips under which the efforts of relevant government bureaux and departments are co-ordinated by the Environment Bureau and the Environmental Protection Department to enhance the management and control of roadside skips. Regarding the questions raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan, the Government's consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) One of the major causes of the problem of placement of skips at the roadsides is the shortage of proper storage areas. Through open tender, the Government has provided two sites, one adjacent to Tseung Kwan O Area 137 Fill Bank and the other at Siu Lang Shui Road in Tuen Mun West, to the relevant organisations of the skip operators trade by way of short-term tenancies (STT) for storing skips. The STT site in Tseung Kwan O can store about 120 skips, and its occupancy rates have been increasing since its commencement of operation in January 2017. Currently, both the average daily and monthly occupancy rates are over 90 per cent. As for the STT site in Siu Lang Shui in Tuen Mun, it can store some 80 skips. Since its commencement of operation in December 2017, the average daily and monthly occupancy rates have been around 30 per cent. The comparatively low occupancy rates are attributable to the insufficiency of facilities thereat. The tenant has committed to enhancing the related facilities so as to boost the occupancy rates. The Government will continue to monitor the utilisation of these two sites and actively identify more suitable sites in various districts for use under STTs by the skips trade to store skips.

(2) and (3) The complaints about roadside skips received by the Government in the past were usually related to road obstruction or illegal occupation of government land. Currently, the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) and the Lands Department (LandsD) handle complaints against roadside skips in accordance with the Summary Offences Ordinance (Cap. 228) and the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 28) respectively. Figures on complaints about roadside skips received, advice or warnings issued and skips removed by the HKPF and the LandsD, as well as the respective numbers of cases in which skip operators were prosecuted and convicted, over the past three years are tabulated at Annexes 1 and 2, with breakdowns by police district and District Council district respectively. In general, upon receipt of advice or warnings issued under the Summary Offences Ordinance by frontline police officers at the scene, skip operators will arrange removal of their skips according to the situations. As each incident was considered on its own circumstances prevailing at the scene, the HKPF did not maintain the information on the average time lapsed from receipt of the complaints to removal of the skips. Penalties for cases convicted under the Summary Offences Ordinance ranged from \$500 to \$3,500 in the past. For the LandsD, the penalty for cases convicted under the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance was \$1,500 in 2015. The time lapsed from institution of prosecutions to convictions in

court depends on court arrangements and whether litigations are required, and normally takes six weeks to six months.

(4) According to the information provided by the Transport Department (TD), the number of traffic accidents involving roadside skips and the related injuries in the past three years are tabulated below. All the accidents were minor ones and mainly attributable to behaviours of the drivers concerned, including driving inattentively, losing control of the vehicle and reversing negligently, etc.

Year	Number of traffic accidents involving roadside skips with injuries	Number of injuries
2015	4	4
2016	4	6
2017	3	5

In addition to the provision of suitable sites to the trade for storage of skips, the Government has engaged a term service contractor since February 2017 to assist enforcement departments in speeding up the removal of skips found to be posing serious obstruction to traffic or imminent danger to the public, thereby further enhancing enforcement efficiency and the deterrent effect. Between February 2017 and April 2018, the departments concerned conducted 34 joint enforcement operations against the unauthorised placement of skips, covering the black spots in Tseung Kwan O, Sai Kung, Kowloon Bay and Kai Tak. The extent of unauthorised placement of skips at these black spots has been noticeably improved. The government departments concerned will continue to organise joint enforcement operations as necessary in various districts to deter the malpractice of unauthorised placement of skips at roadsides.

(5) and (6) The Government has, through organising seminars for the skip operators trade, been promoting safe practices in skip operations and wider adoption of the Guidelines for Mounting and Placing of Skips (Guidelines) issued by the TD. In parallel, the Government has also been in close liaison with the skip operators trade to explore the setting up of a trade-led voluntary skips registration system. Compliance with applicable government requirements and guidelines (e.g. those covered in the TD's Guidelines and other guidelines addressing environmental concerns) will be among the criteria for registration. The voluntary skips registration system will be instrumental in addressing the trade's concerns and raising the compliance rate of government requirements and guidelines. Skip operators are initially receptive to the idea of exploring a voluntary skips registration system to facilitate their skip operations. To take this initiative forward, the Government is engaging an external consultant to work with the skip operators trade in formulating proposals by 2018 for setting up a trade-led voluntary skips registration system.

The Government will review the effectiveness of the above measures, and will, having regard to the progress of the related work and experience gained

from the voluntary skips registration system, examine whether there is a need to introduce a new regulatory system for skips operations in the long run.