

LCQ3: Deploying police dogs to assist in handling demonstrations

Following is a question by the Hon Kwong Chun-yu and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (November 13) :

Question:

Since June this year, the Police have deployed on a number of occasions police dogs to assist in the handling of demonstrations. While the police officers all wore gas masks when firing tear gas rounds to disperse demonstrators, the police dogs at the scene had no protective gear. Some members of the public are concerned that tear gas is hazardous to the health of the police dogs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of in-service police dogs which died of unnatural causes in each of the past three years;

(2) of the number of occasions since June this year on which the Police deployed police dogs for handling demonstrations; among such occasions, the number of those involving the firing of tear gas rounds at the scene of the demonstrations, and the number of police dogs which fell sick after carrying out duties and were treated by veterinary surgeons; and

(3) whether the Police will consider not to deploy police dogs to carry out duties at demonstrations again; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Members of the public enjoy the freedom of expression, speech and assembly but they must do so peacefully and lawfully. The Police have been facilitating the conduct of peaceful, orderly and lawful public order events while fulfilling their statutory duty of maintaining public safety and public order. The Police will, after assessing the situation at the scene, make professional judgement and take appropriate actions to maintain law and order and public peace.

Since early June this year, there have been over 700 public demonstrations, processions and assemblies, among which many have ended up in violence. Rioters have committed various unlawful acts, such as blocking roads, setting fire, charging police cordon lines, throwing bricks, hurling petrol bombs, violently assaulting police officers, vandalising MTR and Light Rail facilities as well as traffic lights, damaging shops, assaulting others

with different views wantonly and committing arson. The Police must take actions for bringing rioters to justice or dispersing those rioters to control the situation, with a view to restoring public safety and public order as soon as possible.

Tear gas is used to stop violent radicals at the scene from charging police cordon lines or continuing with their other violent acts, creating a safe distance and minimising physical scuffles for avoiding serious injuries. People gathered should leave the scene immediately when tear gas is being used. Generally speaking, people inhaling tear gas would have temporary burning sensation to the skin and eyes and stimulation to the nose and throat. One could recover within a short period of time after leaving the place affected by tear gas.

Similar to other modern police forces overseas, the Police deploy police dogs as appropriate to assist in law enforcement. Police dogs could help police officers handle violent acts, unlawful assemblies, disruption of public order, etc. Specific tasks of police dogs under such circumstances usually include assisting frontline police officers to deal with violent and harassing acts, reinforcing police cordon lines and guarding specific buildings or locations. During police dispersal of unlawfully assembled crowds, police dogs could effectively deter illegal acts by breachers of public peace at the scene.

My reply to the various parts of Hon Kwong's question is as follows:

(1) No in-service police dogs died of unnatural causes in the past three years.

(2) and (3) As mentioned above, upon risk assessment of a public order event and the situation at the scene, the Police will, as one of their deployment actions, send police dogs to the scene as appropriate to assist frontline officers in law enforcement.

Police dogs are vigorously trained and receive regular health checks to ensure that they have good nutrition and sufficient rest, and are physically fit to perform duties assigned by the Police. In general, police dogs are deployed to work at emergency units and police districts. They work closely with various frontline squads during police operations for maintaining public and social order and handling emergency situations.

The Police do not have the number of occasions since June this year on which the Police deployed police dogs for handling public demonstrations, processions, assemblies, etc. The Police have not received from handlers reports of their dogs falling sick after carrying out duties during operations in recent months.

The Police pay great attention to the health of police dogs and their working environment. Led by dedicated handlers on a one-to-one basis, police dogs are trained to obey orders from their handlers who build a strong bonding with them by attending to all their needs.

Constantly looking after and paying attention to the physical health and needs of police dogs, handlers will arrange immediate check and treatment by veterinary surgeons once their dogs are found feeling unwell. In fact, all members of the Police Dog Unit are very concerned about the health condition of their dogs. During and after operations, they will pay immediate attention to the physical reactions of their dogs and give them appropriate care. Members of the Police Dog Unit will also attend to the various physiological needs of the dogs. Apart from arranging veterinary surgeons to follow up on police dogs that are sick, handlers will maintain close contact with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and other relevant departments to ensure the health of police dogs.

Thank you, President.