

LCQ3: Use, recovery and recycling of plastics

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (November 4):

Question:

As there are dine-in restrictions in catering outlets and members of the public have gone out less frequently amid the epidemic, members of the public have made more takeaway orders, resulting in an increase in the quantity of disposable plastic tableware discarded. A green group has estimated that currently over 50 million pieces of disposable plastic tableware are discarded in the territory daily, which has more than doubled the relevant quantities in the past few years. Moreover, online shopping has become a new normal amid the epidemic, and the quantity of plastic packaging materials discarded has also increased significantly. The aforesaid situation has put a heavy burden on the ecological environment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the quantity of disposable plastic tableware discarded at the landfills in each month since January 2017;

(2) of the new measures in place to encourage restaurants and members of the public to reduce the use of disposable plastic tableware, and to encourage online stores and the courier industry to reduce the use of packaging materials containing plastics; whether it will review the effectiveness of such measures so as to update the target for reducing the use of plastics; and

(3) as the Environmental Protection Department has rolled out, since this year, a two-year "Plastic Recycling Pilot Scheme", under which contractors are engaged to provide registered places, such as housing estates and schools, in the Eastern District, Sha Tin and Kwun Tong, with free service of collecting waste plastics from non-commercial and non-industrial sources, of the implementation of the scheme; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the scheme and mapped out the way forward?

Reply:

President,

With the use of plastic materials becoming popular, how to handle waste plastics to minimise their impact to the environment and ecology has become an important global issue. The Government has all along been adopting a multi-pronged approach to tackle the problem of waste plastics. On one hand, we have been taking various waste reduction initiatives to reduce waste at source; on the other, through enhancing recycling support, turning waste into

resources and establishing a circular economy. In addition, we have also stepped up publicity and education efforts on various fronts to change progressively public behaviour.

In response to the questions raised by Hon Vincent Cheng, my reply is as follows:

(1) The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) conducts statistical surveys annually to compile the statistical report, "Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong". The statistics include the average monthly quantities of overall plastic tableware disposed, but there are no detailed breakdown figures for plastic disposable tableware.

From 2017 to 2018, the average monthly quantities of plastic tableware disposed were 6 220 tonnes and 6 400 tonnes respectively (equivalent to 205 tonnes and 210 tonnes per day). In recent years, disposal of plastic tableware accounted for less than 2% of the overall quantities of municipal solid waste disposed. We currently do not have the relevant statistical data for 2020. For 2019, as the relevant statistics is still under compilation, we are unable to provide the data at the moment.

(2) We understand that amid the epidemic, more members of the public will choose to order takeaways and use disposable tableware to avoid going out. EPD and the Environmental Campaign Committee have put forward a number of promotion initiatives for eight months since March this year. Through various platforms such as tram and bus bodies, bus and railway stations, outdoor advertisements, news and social media online platforms and mobile applications, etc., we appeal to the public to fight the epidemic, and at the same time to minimise the use of disposable plastic tableware, such as not requesting disposable tableware when ordering takeaways. Some takeaway platforms even set "no tableware" as the default option to facilitate customers to "skip tableware".

In mid-2020, we launched the "Reduce and Recycle 2.0" Campaign. The first phase of the Campaign mainly introduces the different types of recyclables; and promotes the green lifestyle concept of "Save More, Recycle More" and the enhanced community recycling network including 9 Community Green Stations, 22 community recycling centres, and over 100 fixed-location mobile recycling spots that receive various types of recyclables regularly. The second phase of the Campaign will focus on raising public awareness of "plastic-free" culture.

Moreover, in April 2019, the Government has commenced a study on the feasibility, scope and mechanism of controlling or banning disposable plastic tableware. Depending on the study results and analysis, the consultant will recommend to the Government a long-term and suitable plan for Hong Kong. The study is scheduled for completion by the end of this year.

In addition, we will continue to liaise with the retail industry (such as supermarkets, courier companies, etc.) to jointly explore and implement some practical measures to promote the reduction of plastic packaging materials. At the same time, through publicity, education and other various

means, we will continue to encourage different stakeholders to practise simple packaging.

(3) In the past, local recycling mainly focused on recycling of waste plastic bottles and the collection mode was also relatively scattered. To complement efforts on public education and changing public's behaviour to improve the recycling rate of waste plastics, the Government has launched a "Centralised Waste Plastics Collection" Pilot Scheme this year to collect on a larger scale for free all types of waste plastics from non-commercial and non-industrial (non-C&I) sources for proper disposal. A wide range of plastic recyclables are collected, including plastic bags, plastic containers, plastic tableware, plastic straws, fruit sleeve nets, Compact Discs and other plastic packaging materials.

The Government has commenced a two-year Pilot Scheme on Collection and Recycling Services of Plastic Recyclable Materials (Pilot Scheme) in January (for Eastern District) and July (for Sha Tin and Kwun Tong) this year. As of September this year, altogether over 350 premises, including 166 public and private housing estates, 53 single block buildings, eight rural villages and 125 schools and public institutions have registered for service in the three pilot districts. The contractors will also organise weekly about 30 collection sessions via mobile collection points within the districts to facilitate public participation in recycling. The current service area covers about 42% to 64% of the population in the three districts, and a total of about 200 tonnes of plastic recyclables has been collected which is in line with the planned target. The contractors will continue to approach and invite more housing estates and buildings to participate in the Pilot Scheme to increase the quantities of recyclables collected. Subject to the experience and effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme, we will consider expanding the service to the whole territory gradually.

"Plastic-and-Disposable-Free" is a global trend. The Government will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach on various fronts in order to promote a "plastic-free" culture. Among others, municipal solid waste (MSW) charging is an important strategy to pursue waste reduction. Quantity-based MSW charging aims to encourage the public and enterprises to actively practise waste reduction at source. Meanwhile, the Government will strike to promote reuse and recycling, support circular economy and promote green recovery of Hong Kong.

We welcome that the House Committee of the Legislative Council has set up a new Bills Committee to study the Bill on MSW Charging. The Government will actively co-operate with the Members in the scrutiny process to facilitate an early passage of the Bill.

Thank you, President.