LCQ9: Reverse Vending Machine Pilot Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (September 15):

Question:

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) rolled out a one-year Reverse Vending Machine Pilot Scheme (the Pilot Scheme) in the first quarter of this year to install 60 reverse vending machines (RVMs) at public places or government facilities and encourage, through the provision of an instant rebate, the public to return used plastic beverage containers (PBCs). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether EPD has set targets on the quantities of PBCs to be recovered under the Pilot Scheme; if not, of the reasons for that; if so, the details, and whether the quantity of PBCs recovered so far has met the interim targets set originally;

(2) whether EPD has laid down requirements on (i) the contractor's delivery of those PBCs recovered by RVMs to recyclers, and (ii) the recycling arrangements for such PBCs, as well as monitored the entire process, so as to ensure that all PBCs recovered have actually been recycled; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the Government will, based on the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme at this stage, expand the items to be recovered under the Scheme to include other recyclable containers such as aluminium cans and beverage cartons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In order to test out the application of reverse vending machines (RVMs) in Hong Kong, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) rolled out a one-year RVM Pilot Scheme (the Pilot Scheme) in the first quarter of 2021, placing 60 RVMs at different locations in Hong Kong. The Pilot Scheme has received positive responses from the public since its launch.

My reply to the Hon Yiu Si-wing's question is as follows:

(1) The Pilot Scheme aims to test out the application and performance of RVMs at different venues and enable members of the public to get some hands-on experience of the actual operation of RVMs, paving the way for the future implementation of a producer responsibility scheme (PRS) on plastic beverage

containers (PBCs) and considering the targets under the PRS. As such, at this stage there is no specific target set on the quantity of PBCs to be recovered during the trial of RVMs. Currently, the daily average quantity of PBCs collected under the Pilot Scheme is about 70 000, i.e. on average over 1 150 PBCs are collected by each RVM every day. As at September 12, a total of over 8.8 million PBCs were collected for recycling.

(2) The daily operation and management of the Pilot Scheme is undertaken by the Government-appointed contractor. According to the contract terms, the contractor shall collect the PBCs stored inside RVMs, and then deliver them to suitable recyclers as consented by the Government for proper treatment and recycling. The contractor is also required to submit to the EPD, on a monthly basis, statistics on the PBCs collected by RVMs and quantities of the PBCs delivered to recyclers, together with the relevant documents for verification. The EPD will also deploy staff to carry out inspections at the facilities concerned from time to time to ensure that the PBCs collected under the Pilot Scheme are properly treated and recycled, turning waste into resources.

(3) In considering whether to introduce a PRS for a product, we would examine the necessity, recovery/recycling situation and availability of outlets of recycled materials, as well as the priority as compared to other products.

Beverage cartons are composite materials made from paper, plastics, metallic films, etc. These materials have to be separated by means of special technologies before effective recycling can be achieved, and the collection and processing costs involved are relatively high. At present, there is only one plant in Hong Kong for producing recycled pulp from beverage cartons, located in the Yuen Long Industrial Estate. We will keep in view the market changes and development of the relevant recycling facilities, and will explore the feasibility of introducing the respective PRS at the appropriate juncture.

As for beverage aluminium cans, the recycling market is more stable due to their higher recycling value. The metal recycling business can be sustained and driven by the market without government intervention.