

Transcript of Q&A session at press conference on Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots (with photo/video)

The Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, led representatives of various bureaux and departments to hold a press conference today (August 12) on the Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots to be launched by the District Matters Co-ordination Task Force. Also joining were the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan; the Permanent Secretary for Housing/Director of Housing, Miss Agnes Wong; the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene, Ms Irene Young; the Director of Home Affairs, Mrs Alice Cheung; and the Director of Buildings, Ms Clarice Yu. Following is the transcript of question-and-answer session at the press conference:

Reporter: Good afternoon. So you mentioned quite a lot of measures and said you'll strengthen and enhance the efforts in tackling the hygiene black spots. But what's your target specifically, or to what extent do you aim to tackle this problem? Because Mr Cheuk said we need continuous efforts to tackle this, so can you tell us the specific goal that you want to achieve through this programme, and how will you measure the effectiveness or if there are really improvements or not. And about the manpower, Ms Young mentioned you need more people to help tackling this problem, so how much manpower does this programme require and how will different departments define their labour and responsibilities? And lastly, about the goals in the second phase of this programme, what do you want to do to improve the cityscape? And is there another city that Hong Kong can (take) reference from in doing this and also improving hygiene? Thank you.

Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration: I will answer some of your questions and I will invite Ms Young to answer your question about manpower, although overall speaking I do have a feel of the resources requirement for the current campaign. My sense is that we are not talking about a huge amount of resources and if necessary the departments involved will put up their resource bids in the usual manner in the annual resource allocation exercise.

You ask about the target that we want to achieve. I mentioned in my opening remarks that we hope that after our phase one action, just for our phase one action, I'm not talking about the continuous improvement that will last, if you ask me, at least one to two years. After the first phase of operation we do hope the public will see some notable improvement around their usual place of work, their place of residence, and I don't think we can be very specific about, on a scale of 10, we hope we will raise the rating from say, five to 8.5, it's not like that. But I think people are familiar with the place they work or they live, and the public can easily tell. And I

just want to share with you one example: My colleagues and I (because we are working on this hygiene improvement big operation), we went to Mong Kok to have a stroll down Fa Yuen Street, I don't know whether you're familiar with that place. There is an open bazaar there and we walked from Bute Street to Argyle Street, and we can tell the level of cleanliness has visibly improved. So although I was telling our journalist friends here that we will formally launch our campaign to target environmental hygiene black spots this Sunday, but actually our work has already started, because actually the work is ongoing, but we will formally start the campaign on Sunday.

And also you asked about how to measure the effectiveness. Of course there are different channels for us to get public feedback – we get feedback from the government hotline, we get feedback from the political parties, the district personalities and of course the media. So whether we need to put in place an index or a formal survey to measure our effectiveness, I think that we will consider that at a later stage. And I invite Ms Young to answer your question on FEHD (Food and Environmental Hygiene Department) manpower.

Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene: As I said earlier, in this financial year and the coming financial year, we have earmarked additional funding of \$500 million to enhance environmental hygiene services. We will use this amount of money to do several things, including enhancing our cleansing services, our rodent control services, and the cleansing jobs for public markets and hawker bazaars. For example, we will increase the number of enforcement task forces which are responsible for prosecution and enforcement work against illegal dumping of refuse. We will also increase the number of teams for clearing the illegally dumped refuse. According to our estimate, the number of people that we will add to our teams will amount to about 2 000 over these two years.

Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration: I mentioned about improving our open space, improving our street furniture, and also improving our city landscape. For example, although we will start the second phase in October, we have already been in discussion with the relevant departments and we are seriously looking at, for example, some simple but effective means to improve our city landscape, such as replacing the old, perhaps rather dilapidated, road signs, street signs, and also for example, we are looking at introducing to the different districts new designs of the sewer covers. I think that when we go overseas sometimes we notice that you know, in some of the cities, the sewer covers are very beautifully designed. I think that is something we can do to enhance the attractiveness of Hong Kong.

And you also mentioned whether we are taking reference from any particular city. I don't think we need to. But of course, for example, from places like Shenzhen, I think the landscape architecture there is quite pleasing to the eye and I think that we will strive to achieve at least the same level of landscape architecture here. The beautification of city landscape will start in three months' time but I think the process will be longer. As you can well understand, for example if we do more plantation across the territory it will take time for trees to grow. But of course we can also in different districts improve our plantation, and also making the

districts greener. That are the kind of things that we will do, and of course cleaning up. Part of it will be bringing out some of the character of individual streets, and we are also contemplating bringing in murals in different districts with different motifs – that should add to the character of individual districts or places.

Reporter: Three questions. Firstly, FEHD really is part of the problem, I would suggest. You've got the contractors in their trucks, that's probably dirty diesel trucks, they're idling the engines for hours, parking on the pavement, throwing cigarettes out the window. It's kind of a disgrace. And there's been a number of complaints that I've made about illegal garbage or whatever in various districts I've lived, where FEHD has completely failed to enforce even with very accurate information. And I just hear the same as what the Deputy Chief Secretary just said – time and time again is we will step up enforcement, we will remind people, we will do this, blah blah blah. So I'm not really hearing anything new here. So the first question is, you know, how is this actually going to make a difference?

Second question for the Deputy Chief Secretary. You talked of Mong Kok and you talked about a rating system. Now, I walked down Lai Chi Kok Road and Portland Street last night, Prince Edward, Mong Kok, and I would give that a rating of one out of 10 – and if you clean up all of the garbage there, then perhaps I would give it a three – because the problems are not just the garbage. The problems are the illegal construction, hoardings, the bamboo scaffolding, the hoardings which jut out into the pavement, the trucks and cars parked on the pavement, the smokers, the ashtrays that are overflowing. There are so many more problems. You're not going to solve that with a mural and a pretty manhole cover and a new sign. So how do you think really, realistically, you're going to solve those problems? And they're going to need Transport (Department), Highways Department, many other departments to get involved. So what do you think about that? And the third question on the cameras, how many of those 300 cameras have actually caught people dumping garbage who are not in a vehicle, because the last time I asked that question about a year ago: zero. OK. Thank you.

Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration: Maybe I'll take your second question and I'll leave the first and third questions to be answered by Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene. I don't know whether it's fortunately or unfortunately, we walked down the different parts of Mong Kok in the past few days. But you can try to go to Fa Yuen Street, perhaps in the afternoon, and you'll see for yourself whether what I said was a kind of exaggeration. Although you didn't say that, but I think I was just telling this meeting that, actually, I didn't pick Fa Yuen Street because somebody told me that it is clean. It just so happened that I was in the vicinity and I decided that my colleague and I should take a look. But I thank you for bringing to our attention the conditions in Lai Chi Kok Road and Portland Street, and I can understand your frustration with the current situation. You already mentioned a whole host of questions. That involves maybe more than one department to clean up. I think one of the remits of our task force is to co-ordinate departmental action and, for the problems you highlighted, certainly we will see how we can do the operations more effectively and more

sleekly. On the face of it, I am not sure that after our action, the rating, if there is one, will just go from up one to three. I hope we can do better, but I can't promise you how better can we go. But I'm sure this is something that we, I mean this kind of problem is something that we can resolve.

Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene: Our department attaches great importance to the way that our frontline workers and our supervisors carry out their duties. I notice that you have made a number of observations about how they are doing out there. I suggest that if you would like to give us more details then we would certainly look into each case and see if we can do something about that. As regards the 300 cameras that we put out, I think I do not have the exact figures here but I think apart from recording illegal activities, the cameras are also there to have a deterrent effect on people who might think that they could dump refuse just in the street. Maybe we can follow up and give you the information afterwards.

Reporter: Just one quick follow-up. I have actually made thousands of complaints as a citizen through 1823 forwarded to FEHD and had no response over the last few years. So when you say please contact us and we'll look into it, is it a new department? Is there new staff involved? Have people who neglected their duties been fired? I mean, why should I have any faith that anything is actually changed in the FEHD? Thank you.

Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration: I think if I understand it correctly, I think you can provide the information direct to the Director or to her department instead of going through 1823. And in fact, for one of the questions, I think the Director will look at is, I mean, you are telling us that thousands of your complaints were made to the government hotline without any response. I think that is certainly one aspect we will have to look into.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

