

立法會
Legislative Council

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LC Paper No. CB(2) 395/02-03
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 22 October 2002 at 11:50 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok

Members absent : Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Public Officers Attending : **Items II to IV**

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG
Acting Deputy Secretary (Food and Environment Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Edward LAW
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Gregory LEUNG
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Mr W H CHEUK
Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mrs Angel CHOI
Chief Executive Officer (Planning) 2
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr Y S LEE
Chief Project Manager
Architectural Services Department

Item V

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG
Acting Deputy Secretary (Food and Environment Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Gregory LEUNG
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr S P MAK
Deputy Director (Food and Public Health)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr Y Y HO
Consultant (Community Medicine)
(Risk Assessment and Communication)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Clerk in Attendance : Mrs Constance LI
Chief Assistant Secretary (2)5

Staff in Attendance : Ms Joanne MAK
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)2

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes of meetings
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 2863/01-02 and CB(2) 112/02-03]

The minutes of the meetings on 15 July and 10 October 2002 were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)113/02-03(01) and (02)]

2. The Chairman reminded members that the next regular meeting had been re-scheduled to 20 November 2002 at 8:30 am. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting -

Action

- (a) policy on the issue of Food Factory (Pig Roasting) Licence; and
- (b) follow-up discussion on the regulatory control of "private kitchens".

Adm

3. In response to the Chairman, Acting Deputy Secretary (Food and Environment Hygiene) (DS(FEH)(Atg)) said that the Administration would provide the report of the Competition Policy Advisory Group to the Panel as soon as it was available in October/November 2002. She also informed members that the Administration intended to report the outcome of the economic assessment on adopting a labelling system for genetically modified food and the proposed way forward, in December 2002/January 2003.

III. Information paper(s) issued since last meeting

4. Members noted that no information papers had been issued since the last meeting.

IV. Public toilet refurbishment programme

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 113/02-03(03)]

Presentation on the public toilet refurbishment programme

5. Chief Executive Officer (Planning) 2 (CEO(P)2) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) gave a Powerpoint presentation on the public toilet refurbishment programme of FEHD and the features of new generation toilets. She said that major features of new generation toilets included the following

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(a) Outlook/colour scheme

- pleasant external outlook with design and colour compatible with the surroundings.

(b) Internal design and fitting-out

- urinal bowls with modesty board, hand-grip rails, automatic infra-red sensor water taps, toilet paper holders, decorative lighting for mirrors, non-slippery floor and baby-changing counter, etc.

(c) Ventilation and odour control

- odour-source-oriented air exhaust fan for each compartment, oscillating fans in communal area, and mechanical fresh air in-take system at the bottom of the wash-hand basin counter.

Action

(d) Accessibility by people with a disability

- special cubicle installed with emergency alarm bell.

(e) Signage and growing of plants

- illuminated signage, inspection box, planters at external walls and potted plants inside toilets.

(Post-meeting note : The presentation materials were issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 215/02-03 dated 30 October 2002.)

6. CEO(P)2 further said that the new design and enhanced features as well as the use of new technology (such as the sensor-type flushing system) were being tried out in some public toilets.

Discussion

7. Dr David CHU expressed appreciation of the enhanced design and facilities of public toilets. However, he expressed concern about the poor cleanliness of some public toilets in remote areas such as the one on Tung Ping Chau. He suggested that for dry toilets without flushing systems, mains water should be provided for flushing.

8. Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene) (DD(EH)) responded that in the latter half of 1990s, nearly all aqua privies managed by the then Regional Services Department had been refurbished once, and some had been converted into flushing toilets or vacuum toilets. However, many aqua privies could not be converted because of the non-provision of a public sewerage system in the vicinity. He said that FEHD would follow up the case mentioned by Dr CHU.

Adm

9. Mr Michael MAK considered that the proposed enhancements to public toilets were to meet the rising public expectation. As the programme would be funded by public money, he suggested that the Administration might conduct an opinion survey to gauge public views on the reasonableness of the proposed standard of facilities.

10. DD(EH) explained that the aim was to improve the overall cleanliness and maintenance of public toilets and to provide a better public service which was in keeping with Hong Kong's status as an advanced international city. He considered the standard of facilities under the refurbishment programme reasonable, as the fitting-out and materials used were just practical and durable, and were no where near luxury. As regards the provision of toilet papers and liquid soap, he explained that in the past there had been feedback in favour of their provision. He said that the provision of these items was welcome by users and they did not cost much. There was also not much stealing of toilet paper from public toilets.

Action

11. In response to Mr Michael MAK's further enquiry, DD(EH) said that FEHD had all along been contracting out some of its public cleansing services such as street/toilet cleansing and waste collection. FEHD had put in place measures to tighten the monitoring of the contractors' performance and to protect the interests of their employees. The service contract included provisions requiring that the employment agreements of cleansing staff should include the wage payable to the staff, maximum working hours for each day and other major employment conditions such as rest day arrangements, etc.

12. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed support for the refurbishment programme and the enhanced measures to improve the conditions of public toilets. He asked whether the Administration would consider providing toilet paper by vending machines in order to save costs. DD(EH) responded that toilet papers did not cost much, and users would find it very inconvenient if they did not have money to pay for the toilet paper.

13. In response to Mr WONG Yung-kan and Dr LO Wing-lok, DD(EH) said that the refurbishment programme was funded through a block allocation under Head 703. While the provision for next year's programme would depend on the result of the annual resource allocation exercise, the Administration would start the preparatory work in the meantime. DD(EH) further said that assuming that funds were available for the refurbishment programme in the coming years, all the 300 public toilets managed by FEHD could be refurbished by 2006. The refurbishment cost for each public toilet was about \$1.5 to \$2 million, depending on the size of the toilet and scale of refurbishment. On the total project cost, Chief Project Manager (CPM) of the Architectural Services Department advised that the Administration spent about \$100 million for the toilet refurbishment programme each year.

14. The Chairman asked whether the refurbishment programme for 2003-04 would be "dropped" from the Public Works Programme. DD(EH) said that FEHD was optimistic that the programme would continue next year.

15. Mr Andrew CHENG considered that the Administration should ensure good maintenance of the refurbished public toilets, since a considerable amount of public money was spent on the programme. In this connection, he asked whether the Administration would consider providing full-time attendants at all public toilets instead of only at 230 of them. He said that the provision of attendants would help reduce the maintenance cost of public toilets.

16. DD(EH) agreed that good maintenance of public toilets was necessary. He said that full-time toilet attendant services had been provided to the majority of public toilets except those of very low usage. The Administration would arrange cleansing staff to clean up those toilets which were not provided with full-time attendants.

Action

17. In response to Mr Andrew CHENG's question about the wage level of a full-time attendant for public toilets, DD(EH) said that based on the tenders received, the wage level for a full-time attendant was about \$5,200 which was close to the census findings on the wage level for this kind of jobs.

18. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed support for the improvements made to the public toilets. He suggested that the Administration should consider -

- (a) providing the sensor-type flushing system in all public toilets without having to wait for the result of the trial scheme;
- (b) providing disposable paper covers for water closet seats (e.g. by vending machines) in all public toilets; and
- (c) providing air-fresheners, and air-conditioning to public toilets particularly those without fresh air circulation and had a high usage rate.

He also asked whether the refurbishment programme would include enlarging the sewers to prevent blockage.

19. The Administration made the following response -

- (a) The sensor-type flushing system would first be tried out in Pokfulam Road Public Toilet which was scheduled to open in November 2002. If the system proved to be cost-effective, e.g. it was water saving and more hygienic, the Administration would consider extending the use of such system to other public toilets as far as it was technically feasible.
- (b) The Administration was studying the provision of disposable paper covers for water closet seats.
- (c) Air-fresheners had already been provided in public toilets. Cool air would also be introduced to those public toilets which were located in buildings with central air-conditioning systems.
- (d) The refurbishment programme included replacement of the drainage and sewers where necessary.

20. Dr LO Wing-lok asked whether the Administration had adopted measures to reduce the odour problem of public toilets to nearby residents and commercial premises. DD(EH) said that for public toilets with water flushing system, the odour problem was not serious. The problem was more serious for those aqua privies in the remote areas of the New Territories, and measures were being taken to minimise such problem.

Action

V. Findings of the study on dietary exposure of secondary school students to dioxin and heavy metals

[LC Paper No. CB(2)113/02-03(04)]

21. Consultant (Community Medicine) (C(CM)) of FEHD gave a Powerpoint presentation on the findings of the study on dietary exposure of secondary school students to dioxin and heavy metals, covering the following -

- (a) the scope and method of the study;
- (b) international reference on safety intake levels in respect of dioxins and of inorganic arsenic, cadmium and mercury;
- (c) limitations of the study; and
- (d) findings and conclusion of the study.

(Post-meeting note : The presentation materials were issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 215/02-03 dated 30 October 2002.)

22. C(CM) said that while the study indicated that an average secondary school student in Hong Kong would not experience major toxicological effects of dioxins and the three kinds of heavy metals (i.e. inorganic arsenic, cadmium and mercury), high consumers might be exposed to higher risks of undesirable health effects. He added that consumers were recommended to maintain a balanced diet in order to reduce the risk of excessive exposure to these contaminants that might be concentrated within a small range of food items. He emphasised that vulnerable groups such as children and pregnant women should be particularly careful in the selection of foods.

Discussion

23. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether the Administration had a monitoring programme for food items which were known to contain a high concentration of dioxin or the three types of heavy metal covered by the study. Deputy Director (Food and Public Health) (DD(FPH)) replied that under the food surveillance programme, FEHD conducted regular analyses on a range of food samples, and dioxin analysis had been included in the programme since 1999. She said that the study results so far showed that the levels of dioxin and heavy metal in food samples were generally satisfactory, with the unsatisfactory cases made up only less than 1% of the total number of samples tested. She added that more samples were collected on food items of higher risk such as shellfish. If the sampling tests showed that the contaminants in this food item exceeded the safety standard, FEHD would trace the import source. Any further import consignment from the same source would be detained for examination, and the foods concerned would be released for sale only after the testing results were confirmed satisfactory.

Action

24. The Chairman expressed concern that the study had revealed that for high consumers, their dietary exposure to mercury was above the safe exposure level as recommended by the Joint Food and Agriculture Organisation / World Health Organisation (WHO) Expert Committee on Food Additives. He asked whether the Administration had found out the reasons for this. The Chairman also asked which kinds of milk had a higher concentration of dioxin.

25. C(CM) explained that the safe exposure level in terms of Provisional Tolerable Weekly Intake (PTWI) for mercury was an estimate of the amount that could be ingested each week over a lifetime without appreciable risk. He said that predatory fish was found to have higher concentrations of mercury. The high consumer group of mercury might have taken a lot more food containing high levels of mercury and thus exceeding the safe intake level. He pointed out that the study was subject to certain limitations as detailed in paragraph 10 of the Administration's paper, and the students' dietary exposure to mercury could have been overestimated. He said that the Administration would conduct further studies on this.

26. C(CM) further said that the contaminants, such as dioxin, actually existed in the environment. The milk available for sale in Hong Kong was imported from many different places, and it was not advisable to avoid drinking milk just because it contained dioxin. He reiterated that it was more important to maintain a balanced diet in order to reduce the risk of excessive exposure to such contaminants that might be concentrated in a small range of food items.

27. Dr LO Wing-lok said that findings of the study revealed that the level of dietary exposure to dioxin and these kinds of heavy meals was in general satisfactory. However, as the high consumers had a higher intake of mercury than the PWTI, he asked what suggestions the Administration would offer to consumers as to the safe amount of intake of predatory fish. C(CM) said that mercury was commonly found in higher concentration in predatory fish such as shark, tuna and swordfish. As growing children and pregnant women were more susceptible to the side-effect of mercury, C(CM) advised that for a safe lifelong exposure of mercury, the above target groups should not eat more than 60 grams of tuna a week, or four to six pieces of tuna sashimi. C(CM) added that fish was safe to eat, but people should avoid excessive consumption of any particular type of fish, especially predatory fish.

VI. Any other business

Visits to fresh food centres

28. The Chairman informed members that arrangements had been made for the Panel to visit the following fresh food centres in the morning of 30 October 2002 -

Action

- (a) Wellcome Fresh Food Centre in Tseung Kwan O Industrial Estate; and
- (b) PARKnSHOP Fresh Food Distribution Centre at Sheung Shui.

The Clerk would issue a circular on the visits.

29. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:10 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
18 November 2002