

立法會
Legislative Council

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LC Paper No. CB(2)1184/09-10
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 9 March 2010, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
- Member absent** : Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Items III and IV
Prof Gabriel M LEUNG, JP
Under Secretary for Food and Health
- Item III only
- Mr Francis HO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2
- Mr WONG Kai-tat
Chief Engineer/Mainland South
Drainage Services Department
- Ms CHU Lan-ying
Assistant Director (Operations)³
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr Andrew TSANG
Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2)
Home Affairs Department

Mr Ricky CHUI Kin-ming, JP
Assistant Director (Finance)
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Mr FUNG Man-lok
Assistant Director (Youth and Corrections)
Social Welfare Department

Ms NGAR Yuen-ngor
Senior Country Park Officer (North-west) (Acting)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr FUNG Kwok-ming
General Manager/Services
Marine Department

Item IV only

Mrs Angelina CHEUNG FUNG Wing-ping
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1

Dr Philip HO Yuk-yin
Consultant (Community Medicine)
(Risk Assessment and Communication)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Clerk in attendance : Miss Mary SO
Chief Council Secretary (2)5

Staff in attendance : Mr Stephen LAM
Assistant Legal Adviser 4

Miss Josephine SO
Senior Council Secretary (2)1

Ms Maisie LAM
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Ms Sandy HAU
Legislative Assistant (2)5

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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

There was no information paper issued since the last meeting.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1026/09-10(01) and (02))

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next regular meeting scheduled for 13 April 2010 at 2:30 pm -

- (a) Alignment of public market tenancy agreements and one-off Tenancy Transfer Scheme for Operators; and
- (b) Implementation of the Nutrition Labelling Scheme.

III. Progress report on implementation of the enhanced measures to step up environmental hygiene to combat human swine influenza

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1026/09-10(03) and (04))

3. Under Secretary for Food and Health (USFH) briefed members on the progress of the initiatives taken to enhance environmental hygiene to combat human swine influenza (HSI), details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2) 1026/09-10(03)).

4. Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted from paragraph 7 of the Administration's paper that as at 31 January 2010, 100 of the 105 environmental hygiene black spots had been removed from the list after thorough cleansing. Mr WONG asked when the five remaining environmental hygiene black spots were expected to be removed from the list. Also noting from paragraph 33 of the Administration's paper that as at 31 January 2010 a total of more than 2 700 temporary positions for implementing the various initiatives had been created, Mr WONG asked how many of these positions were employed by contractors and on non-civil service contract terms.

5. USFH responded that the five remaining environmental hygiene black spots mentioned in the paper had already been removed from the list in February 2010 after thorough cleansing. USFH further said that as the environmental hygiene black spots list was drawn up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) in consultation with the District Council (DC) concerned and local community groups, FEHD would consult the DC concerned and local community groups before removing a environmental hygiene black spot from the list. USFH then presented some photos of the environmental hygiene black spots before and after enhanced cleansing operations for members' viewing.

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6. As regards Mr WONG's second question on the number of positions employed by contractors and on non-civil service contract terms to implement the various initiatives for each department, representatives of the seven departments replied as follows -

- (a) Assistant Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Operations) 3 (AD/FEH(Operations)3) said that all temporary workers were employed by contractors;
- (b) Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2) (AD/HA(2)) said that 49 temporary jobs were created by the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and 150 temporary jobs were created by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and contractors;
- (c) Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Finance) said that 100 temporary workers were employed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and 280 temporary workers were employed by contractors;
- (d) Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Youth and Corrections) said that 1 550 part-time/full-time temporary cleansing workers were employed by subvented welfare units;
- (e) Chief Engineer/Mainland South, Drainage Services Department said that 80 temporary workers were employed by contractors;
- (f) Senior Country Park Officer (North-east) (Acting), Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said that 27 temporary workers were employed by contractors; and
- (g) General Manager/Services, Marine Department said that all temporary workers were employed by contractors.

7. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked -

- (a) whether the Administration would continue to provide additional funding to the seven departments to enhance environmental hygiene;
- (b) what was the delineation of responsibilities amongst LCSD, HAD and FEHD in the cleansing of public areas under the new initiatives; and
- (c) what work had been carried out by AFCD on improving the cleanliness of country park facilities.

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8. USFH responded that the main objective of allocating some \$300 million to the seven departments was to provide these departments with additional resources to launch a number of initiatives lasting for about 12 months to step up environmental hygiene as well as the related promotion work to fight against HSI. Although the initiatives launched by these departments would last for 12 months, this did not mean that efforts to enhance environmental hygiene would cease after the 12-month period. For instance, LCSD, HAD and FEHD would continue to work in tandem with different sectors to promote and ensure environmental hygiene in districts.

9. Regarding Mr WONG's second question, USFH said that LCSD utilised its additional funding on further strengthening cleansing and disinfection services in leisure and cultural venues with high patronage under their management. LCSD had also engaged additional cleaners to step up the cleansing of computer workstations for public use at the Hong Kong Central Library and other public libraries. In respect of HAD, it had engaged contractors/NGOs to provide cleansing services for the common areas of private buildings without management bodies and the dwelling places of the under-privileged so as to improve the hygiene conditions and to appeal to the owners to up-keep the cleanliness of their premises. As to FEHD, additional funding was mainly utilised on enhancing cleansing and disinfection services in public markets; enhancing street washing services; enhancing the clean-up of environmental hygiene black spots; providing one-off clean-up services to common areas of private buildings without management bodies; and enhancing cleansing services for aqua privies and public toilets.

10. As to Mr WONG's last question, Senior Country Park Officer (North-east) (Acting), AFCD said that AFCD had engaged the cleansing contractors to strengthen cleansing works at country parks (including Ma Shi Chau Special Area, Kiu Tsui, East Dam of High Island Reservoir and Nam Shan Camp site) and refuse accumulation sites near recreational facilities. AFCD had also started to improve the hygiene facilities at country parks, including the provision of 10 more mobile toilets at the East Dam of High Island Reservoir, Needle Hill, Plover Cover Country Park Visitor Centre and Shui Chuen O Street and the installation of automatic cleansing facilities (e.g. water taps, soap dispensers, hand dryers and disinfectant dispenser) in country parks public flushing toilets.

11. Mr KAM Nai-wai asked -

- (a) what actions would be taken by FEHD to sustain efforts to prevent environmental hygiene black spots from recurring;
- (b) whether using high pressure hot water cleaners to wash streets would be made a routine operation by FEHD;
- (c) what were the over 300 activities conducted by HAD to promote personal/environmental hygiene; and

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- (d) what was the reason for discontinuing the Community Cleanliness Index (CCI) to track the effectiveness of the hygiene improvement measures and to identify specific areas where further efforts might be needed through more active participation of the community.
12. USFH reiterated that although the allocation of some \$300 million to the seven departments to enhance environment hygiene in the fight against HSI was one-off, efforts to enhance environmental hygiene by these departments would continue. Although it could not be ruled out the possibility of environmental hygiene black spots recurring in future, swift actions would be taken by LCSD, HAD or FEHD, where appropriate, to eradicate these black spots.
13. Regarding Mr KAM's second question, AD/FEH(Operations)³ said that FEHD had used high pressure hot water cleaners to enhance street washing services regularly. Since last year all cleansing contractors were also required to use high pressure hot water cleaners to wash streets.
14. As to Mr KAM's third and fourth questions, AD/HA(2) responded as follows -
- (a) HAD had organised about 150 seminars and 60 roving exhibitions on promoting personal, household and environmental hygiene in various districts. The remaining some 90 activities mainly involved visits to the homes of the disadvantaged to cleanse their premises and educate them on ways to maintain good hygiene and distributing hygiene packets and promotional materials on streets; and
 - (b) a review on the CCI in early 2008 revealed that it had achieved its intended objective of arousing community awareness of environmental hygiene during its implementation. Although it was no longer necessary to continue with the CCI, the departments concerned would continue to monitor and follow up the hygiene problems in premises under their purview.
15. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that FEHD should not step up efforts to clean up the 105 environmental hygiene black spots only when additional resources were provided.
16. USFH responded that conducting clean-up operations to address environmental hygiene problems had all along been the routine duty of FEHD. As part of the "Fight Against Pandemic" campaign, 105 environmental hygiene black spots throughout the territory were selected by FEHD in consultation with DCs in July 2009. USFH further said that FEHD and other government departments concerned would continue to conduct swift clean-up operations to address environmental hygiene problems upon complaints received from members of the public or through their daily environmental hygiene monitoring

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work. Efforts would also be continued on raising public awareness on environmental hygiene and encouraging the public to notify FEHD and other government departments concerned of any environmental hygiene problems.

17. The Chairman hoped that FEHD could sustain its efforts in addressing environmental hygiene problems. The Chairman noted from paragraph 8 of the Administration's paper that FEHD had thoroughly cleansed the roofs, staircases, lightwells and other common parts of 1 760 private buildings without property management bodies, and from paragraph 12 of the same that HAD had engaged contractors/NGOs to provide cleansing services for the common areas of about 1 100 private buildings without management bodies. The Chairman asked whether these buildings were different buildings and whether FEHD and HAD had any plan to cleanse the remaining private buildings without management bodies. The Chairman further said that it was not hygienic for HAD to place unwrapped face masks together with other hygiene items and promotional materials inside the hygiene packets for distribution to the public.

18. USFH and AD/HA(2) responded as follows -

- (a) the Administration attached great importance to ensure the sustainability of the efforts to enhance environmental hygiene. Several inter-departmental meetings had so far been convened to ensure such;
- (b) both HAD and FEHD referred to the same list of private buildings without management bodies for carrying out clean-up operations. Depending on the environmental hygiene conditions of these buildings, it was possible that some buildings might need additional cleansing by HAD or FEHD or both. FEHD and HAD worked in coordinated manner to avoid duplication of efforts. Although there were more than 5 000 private buildings without management bodies in Hong Kong, not all of them required cleansing by HAD or FEHD; and
- (c) the Administration would see that face masks for distribution to the public were individually wrapped in future.

19. Mr WONG Kwok-hing asked how many CCTV cameras were still in use to monitor rear lanes and environmental hygiene black spots.

20. AD/HA(2) responded that CCTV cameras were previously installed in 11 sites. These cameras had all been dismantled by HAD, following actions taken by FEHD based on the information collected regarding the pattern of environmental hygiene offences. AD/HA(2) further said that as CCTV cameras were often installed in private premises, HAD would need to first obtain the agreement of the owners concerned which was no easy task.

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21. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed reservation about HAD dismantling the CCTV cameras at the previously problematic sites. To avoid the recurring of horrendous condition in rear lanes and streets because of the irresponsible acts of recalcitrant offenders, Mr WONG urged the Administration to re-consider installing CCTV cameras at the aforesaid sites.

22. USFH responded that continued use of CCTV cameras could not complete stamp out environmental hygiene problems, unless the cameras were monitored by staff round-the-clock at the sites so that immediate enforcement actions could be taken. The best way to prevent environmental hygiene problems from recurring was to engage the public in preventing such and enhance cleansing and inspection programme of FEHD. Nevertheless, the Administration would not rule out installing CCTV cameras to monitor environmental hygiene black spots where necessary.

23. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed opposition to the installation of CCTV cameras at environmental hygiene black spots, unless there existed persistent and recurring environmental hygiene problems that could not be resolved despite regular intensive clean-up efforts by FEHD. To do otherwise would undermine individual's right to privacy.

24. In closing, the Chairman requested the Administration to report to the Panel after the completion of the various initiatives launched by the seven departments to enhance environmental hygiene. USFH agreed.

IV. Proposed amendment to the Sweeteners in Food Regulations (Cap. 132U)

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1026/09-10(05))

25. USFH briefed members on the proposed amendment to the Sweeteners in Food Regulations (Cap. 132U), details of which were set out in the Administration's paper.

26. Mr WONG Kwok-hing asked -

- (a) what was the acceptable daily intake of the two types of sweeteners, i.e. neotame and steviol glycosides, proposed to be added to Cap. 132U; and
- (b) what monitoring work was taken by the Administration to guard against the use of non-permitted sweeteners in food.

27. USFH and Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment and Communication), FEHD responded as follows -

- (a) similar to the eight types of sweeteners listed in the Schedule to

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Cap. 132U as set out in paragraph 4 of the Administration's paper, neotame and steviol glycoside had been assessed by the Joint Food and Agriculture Organisation/World Health Organisation Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) to be safe for people with a usual diet. The acceptable daily intakes of sweeteners would not be exceeded, as the sweetness potency of sweeteners was very intense. For instance, neotame and stevio glycosides were 7 000-13 000 times and 200-300 times sweeter than sucrose respectively; and

- (b) the food surveillance programme of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of FEHD included chemical testing to see if there was use of non-permitted sweeteners in food. Moreover, the food trade was required to declare the functional class and the full name or specific identification number of the food additives, including sweeteners, used in prepackaged food for sale in Hong Kong under the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling)(Amendment) Regulations (Cap.132W) starting from July 2007. A consumer guide to food additives was published by CFS in May 2007 to provide a quick reference for consumers to better understand the food labels on food additives. Efforts to help consumers to make informed food choices would be stepped up by CFS to better protect public health.

28. The Chairman was of the view that to better protect public health, consumers should be informed of the level of a food additive that could be safely consumed on a daily basis over a lifetime. The Chairman further asked whether Hong Kong would only allow the use of those sweeteners which had been assessed by JECFA to be safe.

29. USFH responded as follows -

- (a) JECFA would assign an acceptable daily intake of a food additive, including sweeteners, i.e. the estimated amount (usually milligrams) per kilogram of body weight that a person could safely consume on average every day over a lifetime without risk, prior to the approval of the food additive; and
- (b) apart from making reference to JECFA, experts in CFS also made reference to other latest international and scientific developments, say, in the South East Asia region, before presenting all relevant information to the Expert Committee on Food Safety under CFS for consideration of including new sweeteners in the Schedule to Cap. 132U.

30. The Chairman asked whether the eight types of sweeteners listed in the Schedule to Cap. 132U and the two new sweeteners proposed to be added to the

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Schedule were considered and supported by the Expert Committee on Food Safety. USFH replied in the positive.

31. Mr WONG Yung-kan noted from paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Administration's paper that neotame was currently permitted for use in Mainland China, Australia, New Zealand, the US and Canada, whereas steviol glycosides were permitted for use in Mainland China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and the US. Mr WONG asked why neotame was not permitted for use in Japan and Korea.

32. Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment and Communication), FEHD responded that as the neotame and steviol glycosides were both new sweeteners determined to be safe by JECFA in recent years, it would take some time for various countries to adopt their use. In addition, many overseas countries required the trade to submit application for approval of new sweeteners. In the cases of EU and the US, neotame and steviol glycosides respectively were only allowed to be used as sweeteners in the last two years.

33. Dr LEUNG Ka-lau said that according to some doctors in Hong Kong, certain sweeteners permitted for use in Hong Kong could cause muscle pain or even cancer. In the light of this, Dr LEUNG asked what had been done by CFS to ensure that sweeteners permitted for use in Hong Kong were safe for humans.

34. Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment and Communication), FEHD responded that CFS had all along been closely monitoring overseas studies on the safety of sweeteners. Sweeteners permitted to be used in Hong Kong had been evaluated to be safe. USFH also said that although JECFA had thus far considered the permitted sweeteners in Hong Kong safe for use in foods, the Administration welcomed any scientific literature on the negative side of the sweeteners for consideration by the Expert Committee on Food Safety.

35. In closing, the Chairman said that Members would decide whether there was a need to set up a subcommittee to study the proposal amendment to Cap. 132U which was planned for tabling in the Legislative Council in May 2010.

36. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 3:50 pm.