
INFORMATION NOTE

Rodent control

1. Introduction

1.1 Rodents are harmful pests that can cause physical damage to properties and contaminate foodstuff. They can also transmit a number of diseases such as plague, leptospirosis, hantaviral diseases, scrub typhus, urban typhus and spotted fever. As the society is concerned with rodent control, the Administration regularly briefs the Panel on Food Safety and Environment Hygiene ("the Panel") on this subject matter¹.

1.2 At the Panel meeting to be held on 11 July 2012, the Administration will update members on rodent control. To facilitate members' discussion, this information note provides information on the latest results of the rodent surveillance programme, rodent prevention and control measures implemented, details of the Anti-rodent Campaign 2012², and relevant discussions at various committee meetings and Council meetings.

2. Rodent surveillance programme

2.1 To monitor the situation of rodent infestation, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department³ ("FEHD") has been conducting territory-wide rodent infestation rate⁴ ("RIR") surveys in the public areas annually since 2000 by setting baits in selected localities. The localities covered in the surveys are selected from different districts over the territory and are either rodent trouble spots or areas likely to have rodent problems, particularly those with frequent human activities.

¹ At its meetings held on 13 May 2008 and 6 July 2010, the Panel was briefed on rodent control.

² Anti-rodent campaign is part of the Government's territory-wide pest control programme, which is launched on an annual basis.

³ It serves as the pest control authority in Hong Kong, and is responsible for formulating and enforcing preventive and control measures to tackle problems relating to rodents.

⁴ Twice a year in the selected localities, around 100 baits are placed in each locality and each bait is placed at least 50 metres apart to ensure coverage of a sufficiently large area. The ratio of baits bitten of the selected localities ((i.e. number of baits consumed by rodent ÷ total number of baits collected) X 100%) will be the RIR of that particular locality. The results, when aggregated, will give the territory-wide overall RIR.

2.2 According to the Administration, when RIR of any selected locality rises above 10%, FEHD will carry out rodent disinfection operations throughout the entire area under survey. For a locality with RIR at or higher than 20%, the relevant government departments will form a joint task force and launch a special rodent control operation programme to provide comprehensive rodent disinfections and enhanced cleansing services. (See page 7 of the Table for the annual RIRs for the whole territory and for each of the 19 districts between 2009 and 2011 in the **Appendix**.)

2.3 The Table reveals that the territory-wide RIR recorded was 6.1% in 2009, 1.5% in 2010 and 1.7% in 2011. Being lower than the 10% benchmark, these results indicated that the rodent problem in public areas of Hong Kong was largely under control. According to the findings of the 2011 survey, the three districts with the highest RIRs were Sham Shui Po (3.2%), Kwun Tong (3.1%) and Yuen Long (3.0%). FEHD pointed out that relatively higher RIRs in these districts were mainly caused by poor hygiene conditions at specific spots and rear lanes, including accumulation of disused articles, indiscriminate disposal of refuse and improper handling of food remnants, which provided shelter and food for rodents. As such, FEHD would step up its anti-rodent efforts in these three districts with higher RIRs, including eliminating and trapping rodents in rear lanes, and strengthening street cleansing.

3. Rodent prevention and control measures implemented

3.1 FEHD adopts an integrated rodent prevention and control approach and implements a number of measures, including poisoning and trapping of rodents and filling rat holes in related rear lanes, strengthening street cleansing, stepping up inspections in rear lanes with poor hygiene conditions, exchanging experience with other places on rodent control⁵, and encouraging active participation of the public in anti-rodent work. In the financial year 2012-2013, the estimated expenditure involved in rodent control services is HK\$138.6 million⁶, employing a total of 2 260 in-house staff and contractors' workers performing rodent control work.

⁵ FEHD officials attend international workshops and maintain regular exchanges with relevant organizations of other countries/cities to share experience on rodent control and improve the effectiveness of rodent disinfections. An example was rodent control experts from the Guangdong Province visited Hong Kong and shared their professional experience with the staff of FEHD in April 2010.

⁶ Source: *Replies to questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-13 of Special Meeting of the Finance Committee on 9 March 2012: Reply Serial No. FHB(FE)131.*

Anti-rodent Campaign 2012

3.2 To promote the continuous and active participation of the public in rodent prevention and control work, FEHD has organized the Anti-rodent Campaign 2012 in collaboration with other government departments under the theme "Prevent Disease Eliminate Rodent Nuisance". The campaign is implemented in two phases. The first phase was conducted from 28 December 2011 to 24 February 2012, and the second phase will be conducted from 30 July 2012 to 28 September 2012. The target biotopes cover markets/market buildings, hawker bazaars, typhoon shelters, and rear lanes close to licensed food premises and other problematic spots.

3.3 The main objectives of the campaign are to –

- (a) promote the active participation of people living/working in the target areas and their surroundings in rodent control work;
- (b) arouse public awareness on the significance of prevention and control of rodents and their ectoparasites; and
- (c) reduce the rodent population in the territory by enhancing rodent control, particularly in the target areas and their peripheries.

3.4 As for district anti-rodent operations, FEHD launches a series of rodent disinfection operations in districts in collaboration with other government departments, conducts anti-rodent operations at the problematic spots and gives technical advice to the public on prevention and control of rodents.

3.5 On education and publicity, FEHD has organized a thematic exhibition at the Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre located at Kowloon Park of Tsim Sha Tsui. Roving exhibitions are also held at markets and major shopping malls of housing estates, and two seminars have been provided on rodent prevention and control for market tenants, market and food premises management and other interested parties⁷. In addition, new Announcements of Public Interest produced by FEHD have been broadcasted through radio and television to raise community awareness of the importance of rodent prevention and control and mobilize community resources. The same messages are also disseminated through posters, pamphlets and banners displayed in public places and on FEHD's homepage.

⁷ The contents of the two seminars are the same and cover biology of rodents and rodent proofing measures.

4. Deliberations at the Legislative Council

4.1 Issues relating to the rodent control have been discussed by Members at meetings of the Council and various committees, including the Panel. The recent discussions on the issue are summarized in the paragraphs below.

Reliability of the rodent infestation rate surveys

4.2 At the meeting of the Panel held on 6 July 2010, the Administration briefed members on the rodent prevention and control measures implemented. As for the territory-wide RIR surveys, some members questioned about the criteria adopted by FEHD for selecting the localities and the reliability of the surveys in monitoring the situation of rodent infestation.

4.3 In response to members' concern, FEHD explained the methodology of calculating RIR referred to in paragraph 2.1 above and pointed out that there was no internationally adopted RIR. FEHD had made reference to the practices adopted by a number of countries/cities and worked out different methods when devising its RIR. FEHD had concluded that the aforesaid method was the most suitable one for Hong Kong with respect to the local situation and environment.

Rodent prevention and control measures

4.4 Members were of the view that the Administration should strengthen its rodent prevention and control measures across the territory, as the arrangement to step up the rodent disinfection and cleansing work only in districts where a higher RIR had been recorded would make the rodents migrate from these districts to other districts.

4.5 The Administration responded that it was rare that rodents would move to other districts given their limited range of movement. In addition to RIR of the district concerned, frontline staff of FEHD would take into account the complaint figures and views of the local community and the public in targeting rodent prevention and control actions at areas where rodent problems existed. In addition, FEHD had been holding a territory-wide interdepartmental anti-rodent campaign on an annual basis. The Administration would also review the effectiveness of its rodent control measures regularly and consider the way forward as appropriate.

Disposal of dead rodents in public areas

4.6 Members considered that the Administration should pay due attention to the need to dispose dead rodents in public areas, and expressed concern about whether FEHD's contractor staff engaged in the provision of pest control services would have the expertise to carry out the rodent control work if the service contract was awarded to the tenderer with the lowest tender price.

4.7 The Administration responded that there was no cause for such concern, as FEHD would assess both the technical merits and the tender price of a tender. In addition, a tenderer bidding for the contract for the provision of pest control services must meet the requirement that contractor manager and supervisory staff should have no less than five years' and three years' relevant working experience respectively, while contractor frontline staff should receive seven hour training on pest control. To monitor contractors' performance in carrying out the pest control work, FEHD would conduct daily and surprise site inspections and review service reports submitted by contractors.

Tackling rodent problem where licensed food premises operating on a 24-hour basis

4.8 Members raised concern that the rodent problem might have worsened in areas where there were licensed food premises operating on a 24-hour basis. The Administration responded that there was no clear evidence so far to suggest that licensed food premises operating on a 24-hour basis had exacerbated rodent infestation. To address the concern, FEHD had a team of staff responsible for carrying out regular and ad hoc inspections to licensed food premises which operated at night time.

Installing gratings at all underground drainage outlets in the vicinity of markets and fresh food outlets

4.9 At the meeting of the Panel held on 6 July 2010, a member asked whether gratings had been installed at all underground drainage outlets in the vicinity of markets and fresh food outlets, given the effectiveness of gratings in preventing rodents from coming out from the drainage pipes on Chun Yeung Street in North Point after the installation. FEHD advised the Panel that gratings had been installed at the underground drainage outlets of the Central and Western District and Chek Lap Kok. FEHD would continue to work with the Highways Department and the Drainage Services Department in exploring whether gratings should be installed at other locations.

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Appendix

Table – Annual rodent infestation rate (RIR) for the whole territory and for each of the 19 districts between 2009 and 2011

District	2009	2010	2011
Central & Western	4.7%	0.5%	0.5%
Eastern	8.1%	2.3%	0.6%
Southern	6.5%	0.5%	1.6%
Wan Chai	1.6%	4.5%	1.8%
Islands	9.3%	0.5%	0.0%
Kowloon City	5.0%	0.9%	1.4%
Kwun Tong	12.4%	3.1%	3.1%
Wong Tai Sin	7.5%	2.4%	1.5%
Sham Shui Po	7.8%	2.0%	3.2%
Mong Kok	2.0%	1.3%	2.9%
Yau Tsim	5.4%	2.3%	1.8%
Sai Kung	5.4%	0.9%	1.8%
Sha Tin	5.5%	1.3%	1.7%
Tai Po	1.8%	0.0%	0.9%
North	7.2%	0.9%	0.6%
Kwai Tsing	3.1%	1.5%	2.6%
Tsuen Wan	5.1%	2.1%	2.6%
Tuen Mun	8.3%	1.3%	0.8%
Yuen Long	6.6%	1.8%	3.0%
Territory-wide RIR	6.1%	1.5%	1.7%

Source: Replies to questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-13 of Special Meeting of the Finance Committee on 9 March 2012: Reply Serial No. FHB(FE)116.

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