

NOTE FOR PUBLIC WORKS SUBCOMMITTEE OF FINANCE COMMITTEE

Supplementary information on 235DS – Yuen Long and Kam Tin sewerage and sewage disposal

INTRODUCTION

In considering the paper referenced PWSC(2006-07)24 on the above project on 7 June 2006, the Public Works Subcommittee requested the Administration to provide, before the relevant Finance Committee meeting, supplementary information on measures –

- (a) to guard against private village households causing pollution to the environment by disposing untreated sewage, particularly after public sewerage improvement works have been undertaken; and
- (b) to ensure rectification when non-compliance cases were detected.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSE

2. In unsewered areas, village houses commonly use the septic tank and soakaway system for their sewage treatment and disposal. This system can serve its purpose if it is properly maintained and operated. However, when improperly operated and maintained, pollution of the environment and adverse impacts on public health could result. Through provision of sewerage in the relevant areas, the problems are effectively resolved. Where connections are not yet available, the Government takes enforcement action against non-compliance cases as described below.

At locations where no local sewerage is available

3. When we receive complaints about pollution problems caused by septic tanks, we will conduct investigations on site. Usually, the problems are related to improper functioning of the soakaway or overflow from the septic tank.

/If

If an illegal discharge is spotted and it is feasible to collect the required evidence, we will take action under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance. In circumstances where it is impracticable to collect sufficient legal evidence for prosecution (e.g. due to site constraints) we will still require the owner or occupier to rectify any identified problems within a reasonable time. They will be advised to maintain their septic tank and soakaway system properly and in particular to ensure the system is regularly desludged. In the majority of cases, the owners do take action as advised and resolve the pollution problems.

4. The statistics for complaints and prosecutions in the last three years are as follows:

Year	No. of Complaints Against Septic Tank Effluent	No. of Prosecutions Against Septic Tank Effluent
2003	100	10
2004	101	10
2005	79	3
3-Year Total	280	23

5. Where neither local sewerage nor septic tank systems are available, the Government has provided properly operated and maintained public toilets for communal use by the villagers to minimise pollution of the environment.

At locations where local sewerage is being provided to villages

6. One of the most effective means to tackle pollution from wastewater discharges and improve the village living environment is by the provision of sewerage. For villages covered by the village sewerage programme, the Government will first construct trunk sewers and then extend branch sewers to the lot boundary of the village houses. The village house owners are then required under the Water Pollution Control (Sewerage) Regulation to connect their houses to these branch sewers. Prosecution action will be taken against those who fail to comply with the Regulation.

7. During the sewer connection process, the Government will liaise with the villagers on the sewer alignments and connection points. The Government will also help resolve specific problems that may arise. The connection success rate is generally high in mature areas, for example, in the Tolo

/Harbour

Harbour and Sai Kung catchments (i.e. villages in Sha Tin, Tai Po and Sai Kung) where village sewerage programmes were first introduced, the overall average rate of success is as high as 83%. Details of the connection success rates were provided in the paper referenced PWSCI(2005-06)19 which was circulated to Public Works Subcommittee Members in December 2005. From our subsequent site inspection of these sewered areas over the years, the environment has been greatly improved following the sewer connection works.

8. In originally unsewered villages there will always be a limited number of houses that cannot make the sewer connections, mainly due to technical reasons or site constraints. However, as their numbers are small, the result is that following completion of the public sewer works in these locations there are only a small number of complaints about wastewater discharge related to these village houses. For those villages where sewers have been provided under the programme, after the connections have been made the environment is generally good.

Environment, Transport and Works Bureau
June 2006