



**Pesticides Amendment Bill**

peifaan to: mmskwok

Cc: jwychan, cnoffke

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History: This message has been forwarded.

Dear Ms. Kwok,

Thank you for explaining the proceedings and time table for LegCo discussions on the Pesticides Amendment Bill in our telephone conversation of last Monday 8th April 2013.

We do not have the technical knowledge to comment on amendments based on the Rotterdam Convention. During our environmental protection work over the past twenty years we have however come across a number of incidents related to use of pesticides and herbicides that had real or potential impact on public health. We would like to share some of these aspects here, hoping it may help members view the amendment also in the context of actual pesticide use practices in Hong Kong.

As a general comment for future reference, we would find it helpful if chemicals which purpose it is to destroy living organism that are considered by humans as unwanted, could all be amalgamated under one overarching ordinance. This would include, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides.

The Green Lantau Association (GLA) first became aware of the potential danger of improperly used chemicals stored by government departments during an incident in Tai O, Lantau Island about twenty years ago. Then Regional Services Department (RSD) staff dumped large amounts of seemingly undiluted herbicide in a public park without warning park users or protecting themselves, onto a thicket of bamboo with the view of chemically killing the bamboo so as to facilitate removal and substitution with different plants. The subsequent inquiry we requested revealed that the chemical had been used inappropriately and without due authorization by workers who had access to the RSD chemical materials store.

A further incident, this time in Mui Wo, also on Lantau Island, occurred in 2006 when Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) sprayed pesticide on a narrow stretch of planted land between Ngan Kwong Wan Road and the pedestrian promenade linking the Mui Wo Ferry Pier to the Mui Wo Government Offices. In this case too no precautions were taken to protect the workers or alert members of the public, some of whom experienced discomfort after inhaling the

chemicals. The subsequent inquiry requested by GLA revealed that the chemical had been used inappropriately following a decision by LCSD staff who did not have the qualifications or authority to permit the use of such chemicals in such manner and circumstances. It appeared the chemicals were sprayed in an attempt to control innocuous earth worms that had surfaced from the ground after rains.

About a year ago during a visit to Hong Kong Park, on Hong Kong Island, we became aware that a mixture of bleach and possibly herbicide/pesticide had been sprayed in the area of the Park in front and around the Tea Museum where members of the public including children were enjoying themselves. Strong chemical fumes emanated from the sprayed paving-brick circular access path to the museum. It appeared that the purpose of using these chemicals had been to kill off the grass growing in between paving blocks so as to obviate the need of doing this by hand or by grass cutter. We alerted the LCSD Park Management to the situation which agreed to immediately close off the area to the public and send a team of cleaners with high-pressure hoses to wash down the affected pavement.

A fourth incident discovered and reported by GLA occurred at the Tai O Heritage Hotel in September 2012 when a hotel worker was seen spraying pesticide on hotel grounds as well as in surrounding public areas, with no warning or precautions being taken, and without wearing protective gears. We witnessed the pesticide being sprayed around benches where people were reclining or sitting, and spraying taking place against the wind and on steep slopes above the worker's head. On this occasion we challenged the worker, pointing out to him that such spraying practice was not safe either for himself or for nearby members of the public. The worker explained that the type of pesticide being used was absolutely harmless to humans and so there was no need to worry. After we left, he resumed the spraying. GLA reported the case to both the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and the Labour Department's Occupational Hygiene Section. As a result the Hotel was asked to reinforce training for staff using pesticides.

In addition to the above there has been concern within the community about the private use of herbicides in rural areas for the purpose of clearing grass from along footpaths, as well as regarding the use of pesticides on school premises while lessons were in progress or in areas frequented by students. In general we have found that there is a general sense of complacency about the presumed safety of licensed pesticides/herbicides and that these are often deployed in excessive amounts or concentrations by untrained individuals who do not see the need to take precautions to protect either themselves or others.

Regarding agricultural pesticides, we do not feel qualified to comment on their use. However we do feel that apart from licensing pesticides, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department's (AFCD) role should also be to monitor their use and promote training among pesticide workers to try to ensure that the smallest feasible applications are carried out so as to minimise impacts on health and the environment. It would be very positive too if AFCD could actively help propagate organic farming practices and train farmers in such.

GLA would like to see government departments, FEHD and LCSD in particular, reduce chemical pesticide applications in their various areas of responsibility to the minimum and set an annual maximum usage target

for each category of pesticide in their stockpiles. The aim should be to economize on the use of existing stockpiles while reducing orders for fresh stocks. Orders for new purchases of pesticides should be critically reviewed on an ongoing basis and the relevant information should be made accessible to the public.

Regarding the use of herbicides by government departments, it is hoped the current prevailing trend of not using herbicides for vegetation clearance that can be done by hand, by grass-cutting equipment or by machinery will continue to remain the rule. These departments include AFCD (country park trails), HAD (rural footpaths and open spaces), FEHD (refuse collection facilities and public toilets), LCSD (public parks, gardens and sitting-out areas) and the Housing Authority (flower beds, playgrounds and paving-brick areas in housing estates).

Thank you for kindly circulating these comments to LegCo Members engaged in discussing the Pesticides Amendment Bill.

Yours sincerely  
Fabian Pedrazzini  
Green Lantau Association