

Tel : 2867 5795 Fax : 2530 1368

(Urgent by Fax 2856 9902)

Your Ref.: CB4/PAC/R67

Our Ref.: (11) in L/M in FEHD C1&PC/32-60/10/8C

Mr Anthony CHU
Clerk to Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road, Central
Hong Kong

9 January 2017

Dear Mr Chu

Public Accounts Committee
Consideration of Chapter 8 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 67
Sewerage systems in rural areas

Thank you for your letter dated 20 December 2016. I am authorised to provide a consolidated bilingual response from Food and Health Bureau and Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in respect of the matters related to the captioned Report as per attached at

_____ **Annex.**

Yours sincerely



(CHAN Chung-chi)

For Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

- c.c. Secretary for the Environment (fax no. 2537 7278)
Director of Environmental Protection (fax no. 2891 2512)
Director of Drainage Services (fax no. 2827 0287)
Director of Lands (fax no. 2525 4960)
Secretary for Financial Services & the Treasury (fax no. 2147 5239)
Director of Audit (fax no. 2583 9063)

Consolidated Response from Food and Health Bureau and
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department to Questions Raised by
The Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Council in relation to
Chapter 8 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 67 on
Sewerage Systems in Rural Areas

1. No licences issued for desludging of septic tanks and disposal of excretal matter
 - (a) Please provide the reasons why the 78 private operators mentioned in paragraph 2.47 had not been issued with licences, and advise on whether they might operate the business only if they had been issued with licences. What was the total number of licence applications made to the Department for provision of septic tanks desludging and excretal-matter disposal services? What is the current number of licensed private operators? If an operator operates the aforesaid business without a licence, what actions and measures will the Administration take to combat and improve the situation?
 - (b) Regarding the situation in paragraph 2.46, what were the reasons for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") not having conducting a review on the absence of requests for septic tanks desludging services from the public over the past 13 years? Can it advise whether the substantial decline in the number of requests for the aforesaid services from the public between 2000 and 2016 could be attributed to insufficient publicity or changes in market demand? If so, will FEHD conduct a review expeditiously? If not, what are the reasons? In the long run, will FEHD realign the contents of relevant services and the number of staff in accordance with the current public demand so as to achieve optimal allocation of resources? If it will, what are the details? If not, what are the reasons for that?

Reply:

Under section 9 of the Waste Disposal Ordinance (WDO, Cap.354), the "collection authority" is authorised to provide, among others, the desludging services of septic tanks. Under section 10 of the Ordinance, the "collection authority" may, by licence, permit any person to provide, among others, the desludging services of septic tanks as referred to in section 9. The "collection authority" includes the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD).

In the past when there was only limited supply of mechanical desludging services in the private market, FEHD, apart from the provision of desludging services for septic tanks at government venues, entertained requests from members of the public and provided the services to a few private venues upon payment of the service cost subject to the team's capacity. With an increasing supply of such services in the private market, the demand for FEHD's desludging services has been on the decline. On the other hand, upon gradual conversion of over 600 aqua privies in rural area into flushing toilets for public use in the past two decades, the demand for desludging service has diminished significantly and the FEHD's desludging fleet was downsized. The fleet remaining is now fully engaged in providing service primarily to government venues, including the remaining 50 aqua privies and some public toilets without sewage treatment facilities. The service demand from private venues is mainly met by the private sector.

EPD has introduced licensing regimes for the collection of chemical wastes and clinical wastes, with due regard for the special nature of such services. The desludging services for septic tanks, however, do not require any licence for operation in view of its simple operation. There are so far few reports of malpractices of desludging service providers. Currently, private desludging service providers are not required to obtain such licenses but they have to ensure proper management of the sludge in septic tanks, and illegal dumping is liable to prosecution under section 16 of the WDO.

2. Ineffective action taken to prevent illegal dumping of excretal matter
 - (a) What is the Environmental Department ("EPD")'s view on the effectiveness of installing surveillance cameras as mentioned in paragraph 2.53? For cases of unsuccessful prosecution, was it due to a lack of resources to procure sufficient cameras, or were there other reasons? If EPD and FEHD continue to adopt this approach of installing surveillance camera systems at more blackspots of illegal dumping of waste, including excretal matter, what are the estimated costs?

Reply:

In order to formulate an implementation plan, EPD is now conducting a comprehensive review on the information and experience obtained from the Pilot Scheme, exploring the enhancement of the technical specifications of the surveillance cameras, and making reference to the investigation and enforcement methods of other government departments. Upon release of EPD's review report, FEHD will draw reference from the experience of EPD to explore ways to improve the present enforcement measures to tackle the problem of illegal dumping of waste in public place.