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(By fax no: 2543 9197)

27 January 2017

The Public Accounts Committee
 Legislative Council Secretariat
 Legislative Council Complex
 1 Legislative Council Road
 Central
 Hong Kong

(Attn.: Mr. Anthony CHU)

Dear Mr. CHU,

Follow-up to Public Accounts Committee Report No. 61

Management of Roadside Skips

I refer to Public Accounts Committee's letter of 10 January 2017 to the Secretary for the Environment and am authorized to give the coordinated reply on his behalf in consultation with the relevant Government Bureaux and Departments.

The Joint Working Group on Management of Roadside Skips¹ (the "JWG") set up by the Government coordinates efforts of relevant Bureaux and Departments in enhancing the management of roadside skips. The JWG considers that it is important to address the lack of storage sites for skips in tackling the skips problem. In this regard, a new site identified at Tseung Kwan O Area 137 Fill Bank was leased out through a short-term tenancy to the skips operators trade in December 2016, and is expected to be operational by end January 2017 for use by the skips operators. Another site at Siu Lang Shui, Tuen Mun will also be made available via a short-term tenancy and is expected to be ready for storing idling skips in the second quarter of 2017. The JWG will monitor the utilization of these two sites and if necessary, will search for more sites for placing idling skips.

¹ The JWG is led by the Environment Bureau and the Environmental Protection Department and comprises the Development Bureau, the Transport and Housing Bureau, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Lands Department, the Transport Department, the Highways Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Home Affairs Department (on a need basis).

The JWG has also planned that once the new skips storage site at Tseung Kwan O Area 137 has been commissioned, a dedicated term contractor will be engaged to assist the enforcement departments to speed up removal of skips that are found to be posing serious obstruction to traffic or imminent danger to the public. This will further enhance the enforcement efficiency and the deterrent effect. The skips removal term contractor service is expected to be ready for deployment in February 2017 and the enforcement departments will step up accordingly enforcement action against indiscriminate placement of skips on roadside. The Hong Kong Police Force (the “HKPF”) and the Lands Department (the “LandsD”) will also join the coming operations to be organized by District Office, Sai Kung in February 2017.

In parallel, the JWG has been following up with the skips operators trade to promote and facilitate better management of skips operation, such as standardizing the specifications of skips, and promoting good operation practices.

Below are the specific information requested in paragraphs 3(a) to (c) of your letter:

(a) The number of “idling” skips existing on roadside

According to the skips operators trade, there are about 3,500 skips in Hong Kong including about 1,500 skips which are placed in works sites and storage areas while the remaining skips (around 2,000), mostly idle ones, are placed on relatively less busy roads or in public places in remote areas.

(b) Which Government bureau(x)/department(s) will take up the responsibilities for regulating and facilitating skip operations

At present, legislative control for tackling roadside skips found to cause obstruction and illegal occupation of Government land are provided for under the Summary Offences Ordinance (Cap. 228) and the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 28) respectively. The HKPF and the LandsD have been vigilant about the problem of roadside skips and have been mounting enforcement operations from time to time in order to deter malpractice of skips operators.

In 2016 and 2015, 1,441 and 1,230 complaints were received respectively by HKPF. Among these complaints, the scene officers were able to locate roadside skips in 2,171 cases; and HKPF had given advice and/or warnings under the Summary Offences Ordinance (Cap. 228) in 1,793 cases. The skips were removed by the skips operators in over 65% of the cases, usually shortly after receiving the advice and/or warnings. A total of four roadside skips were removed by HKPF and 11 prosecutions undertaken by way of summons. During the same period, LandsD handled 1,098 and 858 complaints respectively (some were against the same skips) in accordance with the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 28). The skips were removed by the skips operators in 99% of the cases, usually within two days of LandsD’s posting of the relevant notices on the skips.

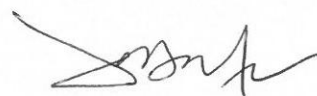
The JWG will review the effectiveness of the measures, including providing skips storage sites and a dedicated contractor for skips removal, twelve months after they have been introduced (i.e. around third quarter of 2018) to examine whether there is need to introduce further measures, such as a new regulatory system or assigning a Department to take up the overall responsibility for regulating skips operation in the longer term.

(c) The progress of implementing short-term safety measures proposed by the Transport Department as stated in PAC Report No. 61

The short-term safety measures mentioned in PAC Report No. 61 related to the Transport Department (the "TD") was about the promotion of the guidelines for Mounting and Placing of Skips (the "Guidelines"). The TD has stepped up promotion. Apart from distributing the Guidelines to the trade and uploading them on its website for the reference of skips operators (http://www.td.gov.hk/filemanager/en/publication/skip_en.pdf), the TD also participated in four seminars organized by the JWG to explain to the trade in detail the importance of planning in advance the delivery, placing and guarding of skips so as not to cause nuisance and safety threats to the public. The TD also reminded the trade of the good practices regarding mounting and placing of skips, such as all exposed faces of skips should be painted bright yellow; and that during the hours of darkness, yellow flashing lights should be attached to each upper corner of skips as stated in the Guidelines. The TD will continue to actively participate in the JWG to formulate strategies and action plans for regulating and facilitating skips operation, and to maintain close liaison with the skips operators.

Separately, arrangements have been made with 1823 so that with effect from 12 March 2014, complaints received by 1823 about skips placed at roadside referred to the LandsD for enforcement (that were classified as not causing serious obstructions) will be copied to TD in parallel. TD will re-examine the cases, and if the skips concerned are found to be causing greater obstruction or imposing higher risk of traffic accidents, the TD will refer the relevant cases to the Police for enforcement actions. According to traffic accidents statistics, the numbers of accidents involving collision with skips in the past four years were very low, ranging from two to four per year (less than 0.03% of all traffic accidents) and all of them were minor traffic accidents with no persons killed or seriously injured.

Yours sincerely,



(Joe Fong)
for Director of Environmental Protection

c.c.

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