

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

EEB(F)118

(Question Serial No. 3200)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Donald NG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

Rodent infestation has been a persistent problem in Hong Kong, causing impacts on public health and the daily lives of members of the public. There has been controversy over the cost-effectiveness of overnight rodent control operations, as the rodent infestation rate has not been improved substantially despite deployment of additional manpower and equipment. In this connection, please advise this Committee of the following:

- (a) What is the hourly cost for overnight rodent control operations (such as overtime payments, the wear and tear of equipment, etc.)? How to quantify their effectiveness (for example, by the number of rodents eliminated or by the decrease rate of complaints)?
- (b) Will the Government make reference to the rodent monitoring system with artificial intelligence adopted by Singapore? If new technologies (such as monitoring with artificial intelligence and genetic rodent control) are to be tried out, will the tendering process and the background of manufacturers be made public? Will the budget in this regard be separate from the regular funding for rodent control?
- (c) As rodent control involves a number of departments, such as the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the Buildings Department, the Home Affairs Department, etc., it may easily result in scattering of resources. Will the Government establish a unified budget in this regard and draw up an arrangement for the division of work? How to avoid duplicate procurement of rodent control tools (such as rodent traps and baits) among the departments?
- (d) If there is a need to outsource the rodent control service, how will the Government monitor the performance quality of the contractors engaged? Will annual/quarterly KPI and penalties for underperformance be set?

Asked by: Hon TANG Ka-piu (LegCo internal reference no.: 40)

Reply:

- (a) Since July 2022, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has set up a number of overnight rodent control teams in all districts across the territory, carrying out continuous and intensive rodent trapping work with the use of rodent traps in areas with more serious infestation in the small hours to enhance the effectiveness of rodent control.

The number of live rodents caught in 2024 was 89 629, an increase of around 41% over that in the corresponding period in 2023 (63 344), and around 97% more than that in the corresponding period in 2022 (45 422), indicating the enhanced effectiveness of rodent control. In 2024-25, the expenditure for overnight rodent control teams was about \$52 million. As these teams are tasked with various duties including pest control work, data analysis and supervision, it is difficult to calculate the hourly cost for their overnight operations.

- (b) From 2024 onwards, the Department has fully adopted thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence technology for conducting the Rodent Activity Survey (RAS). The Department has engaged outsourced contractors for installing and operating thermal imaging cameras as well as using artificial intelligence to help analyse the thermal images captured. The service contracts involved are awarded through open tender in accordance with the Government's procurement requirements and procedures. The Department conducts 2 rounds of RAS covering all districts across the territory each year. The expenditure of about \$12.67 million in 2024-25 and the estimated expenditure of about \$5.91 million for 2025-26 are part of the Department's expenses on pest control work.
- (c) Currently, all government departments are responsible for carrying out rodent control work in the premises under their management as part of their overall management duties. Such clearly defined division of work enables the departments to deploy resources flexibly according to their actual circumstances for handling the work concerned. Where necessary, the Department will provide technical support for other departments so as to enhance the effectiveness of rodent control.
- (d) The Department is committed to enhancing the management mechanism so as to monitor the performance of its outsourced contractors, including the pest control service contractors. Pest control service contractors are required to provide services according to the provisions of the contracts. Performance requirements of the contractors are clearly stipulated in the contracts. Staff of the Department will monitor the contractors' compliance with the contract provisions in service delivery in accordance with the operational manual for management of contracts and by means of site inspections, surprise checks, examination of job records, etc. In the event of any irregularities, defaults or non-compliance with contract provisions in the delivery of services, the Department will take follow-up actions, including the issuance of verbal warnings, written warnings and default notices coupled with deduction of monthly payments. Such performance records will also have a bearing on the tenderers' future bidding for the Department's outsourced service contracts.