

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)139

(Question Serial No. 1496)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified
Programme: (2) Environmental Hygiene and Related Services
Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)
Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

With regard to the prevention and control of rodents, please advise this Committee of the following:

1. as the Bureau indicated that representatives had been dispatched to discuss with academics the possibility of controlling rodent infestation by using cats and that overseas experiences had been studied, whether the Department has considered engaging a consultant to study the issue, and whether a pilot scheme will be implemented at rodent infestation blackspots to gauge the effectiveness of controlling rodent infestation by keeping cats; if yes, the details; if not, the reason(s);
2. the measures that the Department has put in place to tackle rodent infestation in districts with relatively higher rodent infestation rate, such as Sham Shui Po and Mong Kok, and whether the Department has considered allocating more resources and manpower to control the rodent problem; if yes, the details; if not, the reason(s); and
3. whether the Department has considered inviting experts from the Mainland or other countries to come to Hong Kong on a regular basis to share their experience in the prevention and control of rodents; if yes, the details; if not, the reason(s).

Asked by: Hon CHIANG Lai-wan (Member Question No. (LegCo use): 12)

Reply:

1. Although cats have the ability to prey on rodents, their predation targets are not limited to rodents. Cats would also prey on other small mammals, birds, reptiles, etc. As for whether keeping cats in Hong Kong is effective in controlling rodents, including establishing and nurturing community cats to assist in eliminating rodents, this has yet to be proved empirically. However, keeping of cats imposes certain risks from the perspective of both hygiene and infectious diseases. The cats so kept may spread zoonotic diseases, such as ecto- and endo-parasites and *Toxoplasma gondii*, through their excreta, which may also pollute the environment. Furthermore, there is no

guarantee that all cats are given proper care, such as vaccinations and deworming on a regular basis. This will bring about animal welfare issues. Moreover, keeping cats in public places will also affect the current anti-rodent strategy of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department). If there are cats, rodenticides and traps must be removed from the area to prevent cats from accidentally swallowing rodenticides or activating the rodent traps. This will affect the integrity of the Department's anti-rodent strategy. The Department has no plan to carry out field trial or feasibility study at the moment but would continue to explore the possibility with different stakeholders and provide technical input from the rodent control point of view to any possible study to be undertaken by stakeholders.

2. The Department will continue to enhance rodent control work and launch district-specific rodent control measures, including publicity and educational programmes to promote greater community involvement, in addition to its regular pest control work and annual territory-wide publicity campaigns. To intensify district rodent prevention and control work, the Department launched 2 two-month anti-rodent operations in designated target areas in all districts in May and September 2017, and adopted multi-pronged strategies to combat the rodent problem, including elimination of food sources and hiding places of rodents, as well as blocking their passages, so as to work for a clean and hygienic community. The Department also stepped up public education and publicity during the operation and arranged health talks for building management offices of private buildings, persons-in-charge of food premises, and market and hawker stall operators to provide information and technical advice on rodent prevention and control. Anti-rodent operations in designated target areas will continue in 2018 in which public education and publicity will also be stepped up.
3. The Department has been adopting an integrated approach in the prevention and control of rodents through cleansing, rodent elimination, enforcement as well as publicity and public education. This approach is premised on the recommendations and technical guidelines of the World Health Organisation and is in line with that adopted by the Mainland and other countries, like Malaysia, Singapore, as well as countries in Europe and North America. The Department will continue to keep in view the latest development in rodent control methodologies and technologies through regular participation in international conferences in pest control and carry out necessary study to explore the feasibility of any potential new technologies and methodologies for local use. For example, in 2017, staff of the Department attended international pest control conferences organised by the Federation of Asian and Oceania Pest Managers Associations and the International Conference on Urban Pests to share experience and exchange ideas in pest control with experts from around the world.

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