CONTROLLING   OFFICER'S   REPLY

(Question Serial No. 3557)

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 (Ms Irene YOUNG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

It is mentioned under the Programme that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will continue to implement and trial new measures to enhance and sustain the effectiveness of its rodent control work, including continuing with the overnight rodent control operations and trial use of new rodent control technologies and tools, etc.   In this connection, please advise this Committee of the following:

1. What are the manpower and expenditure involved in rodent prevention and control work in the past year?
2. There is an increase in the number of rodent trappings in the past 2 years.   How many rodents were caught by rodent trappings in these 2 years?   Has the Department considered using other anti-rodent measures?
3. It is learnt that a new rodent surveillance programme will be implemented this year. What are the details of the programme as well as the estimated manpower and expenditure involved?
4. As some members of the public have relayed that rodents frequently appear in "three-nil" buildings, the Department has co-operated with the Home Affairs Department to subsume rodent control under the "District-led Actions Scheme" and provide anti-rodent services.   What are the expenditure and details of the anti-rodent programme?   Has the Department considered continuing with or extending the programme to cover the "three-nil" buildings in all the 18 districts in the territory?

Asked by: Hon CHENG Wing-shun, Vincent (LegCo internal reference no.: 55)

Reply:

1. In the past year, 854 in-house staff of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and 2 352 staff engaged by the contractors provided pest control services, including the prevention and control services of rodents, mosquitoes and other arthropod pests with public health importance.   The overall expenditure of FEHD on pest control services in 2023-24 was $808 million (revised estimate).

2. The numbers of live rodents caught by FEHD in the past 2 years were 45 422 and 63 344 respectively. FEHD does not keep the statistics of the number of rodents caught by rodent trappings.

In 2024-25, apart from using ordinary rodent trapping devices, FEHD will continue to use T-shaped bait boxes and alcohol rodent trapping devices, apply glue traps at indoor venues with more serious rodent infestation (such as markets and refuse collection points), as well as fully adopt thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence technology for conducting the Rodent Activity Survey (RAS), in order to enhance rodent surveillance in districts.

3. FEHD has fully adopted thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence technology for conducting the RAS as a replacement for the original Rodent Infestation Survey from 2024 onwards. The RAS will be conducted in all districts across the territory once every six months. FEHD will take into account a basket of factors, including rodent-related complaint figures which have been confirmed upon investigation, number of live and dead rodents caught, inspection results and the views from local communities, etc., to identify locations with potential rodent problems in each district as the sampling frame. For each survey, based on factors such as geographical distribution and complaint figures, approximately 100 locations will be selected from the sampling frame via stratified sampling for installation of thermal imaging cameras for capturing thermal images in order to effectively deploy resources and ensure the representativeness of the sampled locations. Artificial intelligence will be used in the survey to help analyse the images and identify the presence of rodents. A Rodent Absence Rate (RAR) will be enumerated for the district based on the analysis results.

The RAS for the first half of 2024 has already commenced, and the RARs for the 5 districts covered in the first phase, including Central and Western, Wan Chai, Eastern, Mong Kok and Sham Shui Po Districts, have been published. The surveys for the remaining 14 districts are commencing in phases, and the findings will be progressively published and uploaded onto the website of FEHD for public information.

FEHD has engaged outsourced contractors for installing, operating and demounting thermal imaging cameras. The thermal images taken are analysed with the use of artificial intelligence technology. The estimated expenditure for each six-month survey which covers all districts across the territory is about $7.5 million.

4. The Home Affairs Department utilises the resources of the "District-led Actions Scheme" (Action Scheme) to implement projects for "improving district environmental hygiene", "strengthening the work of mosquito control, grass cutting, rodent control and pest control" or "strengthening support for three-nil buildings" in the 18 districts to enhance district rodent prevention and control services. The relevant rodent prevention and control work includes installing rodent trapping devices, placing new types of rodent bait boxes, installing rodent meshes and rodent guards, replacing baits and disposing of dead rodents regularly, as well as carrying out additional rodent control work by FEHD at the rodent blackspots in public places. In 2023-24, the total expenditure incurred on items involving rodent prevention and control as well as general cleansing services in the districts under the Action Scheme was about $15 million, of which about $6.1 million was to support the cleansing and pest control work at the

common areas of three-nil buildings for alleviation of rodent infestation.   All District Offices will continue to include pest control services in the cleansing service contracts for the common areas of three-nil buildings subject to resources and needs.

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