

LCQ13: Disposal of yard waste

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) set up Y·PARK, a yard waste recycling centre, in 2021, with the purpose of converting recycled yard waste into useful materials to reduce disposal at landfills and associated carbon emissions. Y·PARK has a target handling capacity of about 11 000 tonnes in the first year, which would gradually increase to an annual average of around 22 000 tonnes. However, information from the Government shows that Y·PARK's throughput last year was 6 876 tonnes. Besides, earlier on some trucks were reportedly driven from Y·PARK carrying yard waste to landfills in the New Territories West for disposal, and the EPD subsequently explained that the yard waste in question was not acceptable as it contained a large amount of impurities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of Y·PARK's criteria for the recovery of yard waste, whether it has studied the reasons for the gradual decline in the amount of yard waste handled by Y·PARK in recent years, including whether this is affected by Y·PARK's recovery criteria or the fact that yard waste producers recycle their own waste;

(2) as it is learnt that Y·PARK's major sources of yard waste are (i) □construction works and (ii) clearance work arising from regular vegetation maintenance, whether there is a statistical breakdown of the amount of yard waste respectively from (i) and (ii) handled by Y·PARK from 2021 to date; of the amount of yard waste that was sent to but not accepted at Y·PARK over the past three years, and whether it has looked into how such yard waste was subsequently disposed of (such as conversion into biochar and being sent to landfills);

(3) given that according to a paper submitted by the Government to the Subcommittee to Study Policy Issues Relating to Municipal Solid Waste Charging, Recovery and Recycling of this Council in January 2023, a pilot biochar plant in EcoPark, which will further convert recyclable products of Y·PARK into biochar, has an estimated capability of converting about 6 000 tonnes of local woody waste into some 1 200 tonnes of biochar annually, of the amounts of waste handled and biochar produced since the plant came into operation, and whether such amounts could meet the targets; if not, when they are expected to meet the targets; and

(4) given that according to the report on Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong, the amounts of yard waste recovered and disposed in Hong Kong in 2023 were 10 400 tonnes and some 83 000 tonnes respectively, while the amount of

yard waste handled by Y·PARK in the same year was 8 609 tonnes, whether it has assessed if there is room for improvement in Y·PARK's handling capacity; whether the Government has further strategies in place to enhance the recovery rate of yard waste?

Reply:

President,

After the onslaught of Super Typhoon Mangkhut, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) set up a temporary yard waste recycling centre, Y·PARK, in 2021 to collect and process yard waste generated from regular vegetation maintenance and public construction works on one hand, and to assist in treating large quantities of yard waste generated after emergency incidents such as super typhoons on the other. The service fees paid by the EPD to the contractor are not based on the amount of yard waste received, but on the quantity of recyclable products produced by the contractor, which reflects Y·PARK's performance more accurately.

The reply to the question raised by the Hon Andrew Lam is as follows:

(1) To ensure the smooth operation of Y·PARK and the quality of the recyclable products, Y·PARK has established appropriate standards for yard waste recycling, including not accepting infected or infested wood, yard waste which is difficult to process such as tree stumps, pure twigs, leaves, grass clippings, or yard waste containing large amount of impurities. If yard waste is mixed with large amount of impurities, the chipping operations may be severely affected. For instance, Y·PARK's wood chipper experienced mechanical failures due to metal rods hidden in the wood. Time and manpower were required to remove the rods, replace parts and repair the equipment. Such incidents could even halt the production line. Meanwhile, the quality of the recyclable products produced may be affected by impurities. For instance, plastics mixed into the recyclable products would limit their use in gardening. In this regard, the contractor of Y·PARK maintains communication with yard waste producers to explain how to properly separate waste at source to reduce instances where Y·PARK has to reject yard waste.

One of the Y·PARK's functions is to assist in handling the large amount of yard waste generated in a short period of time after super typhoons. Therefore, when Y·PARK was set up in 2021, we required the contractor to have sufficient handling capacity as buffer of up to 30 tonnes per day (i.e. about 11 000 tonnes per year) in the first year and to gradually increase to 60 tonnes per day (i.e. about 22 000 tonnes per year) subsequently. Yet the actual amount of yard waste received at Y·PARK is subject to various factors such as the number and intensity of typhoons during the typhoon season each year, the operations and progress of government and private site formation projects, and the quality of the yard waste.

(2) Since its commencement of operation in 2021 up to April this year, Y·PARK has received a total of approximately 31 540 tonnes of yard waste, of which more than 50 per cent from construction works and about 40 per cent from

routine vegetation maintenance. The EPD does not have the quantity of rejected yard waste and information on its final disposal means.

(3) The first Pilot Biochar Production Plant (PBPP) in Hong Kong established by the EPD was originally scheduled to commence production in November 2023, with an estimated handling capacity of processing about 6 000 tonnes of local wood materials and producing about 1 200 tonnes of biochar annually. The PBPP commenced its testing in May 2023, during which many technical issues were overcome and various operational conditions (including processing temperatures, duration, and different types of wood-based raw materials) were adjusted and tested, in order to identify the optimal operating conditions and ensure high-quality biochar can be produced with less energy consumption. The PBPP finally commenced production in October 2024. From the start of the PBPP's testing stage to the end of April 2025, the PBPP has processed over 1 200 tonnes of local wood materials from yard waste, converting them into more than 270 tonnes of biochar. The purposes of setting up the PBPP are to explore the technical feasibility of converting local wood materials from yard waste into biochar, as well as to study the quality of the biochar produced and its practical applications in the local market. As such, the actual processing quantity of the PBPP is adjusted based on testing needs and is also affected by the supply of wood materials and local market demand for biochar applications. With the PBPP entering production stage for only about six months, the EPD will consolidate operational experiences with a view to gradually increasing its processing quantity upon establishing technical requirements and market applications.

(4) In order to further enhance the yard waste processing quantity of Y·PARK, the EPD are adopting a multi-pronged approach to increase the yard waste recycling rate. Measures include: (i) the EPD will continue to liaise with relevant government departments and other yard waste producers, encouraging them to adhere to the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle, and treat and reuse yard waste on-site as far as possible, while yard waste that cannot be treated or reused on-site could be delivered to Y·PARK or other suitable recycling facilities for treatment; (ii) to encourage the Y·PARK contractor to recycle collected yard waste as far as possible to increase its recycling rate. The current contract stipulates that the service fees paid by the EPD to the contractor are based on the quantity of recyclable products produced, providing a financial incentive to the contractor; and (iii) in the long run, the Government reserves land in the New Territories North New Town to establish a larger-scale yard waste recycling facility to enhance yard waste handling capacity.