

LCQ19: Development of underground space

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (November 20):

Question:

Regarding the development of underground space, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the total length of the pedestrian passageways situated below the ground at public places at present, with a breakdown by District Council (DC) district;

(2) of the respective total floor areas and percentages of the commercial space situated below the ground at Government properties and private properties at present, with a breakdown by DC district;

(3) of the respective total floor areas of the car parks situated (i) above the ground at Government sites, (ii) below the ground at Government sites, (iii) above the ground at private sites and (iv) below the ground at private sites, as well as the respective numbers of the various types of car parking spaces provided in such car parks, in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by DC district;

(4) whether it has plans to construct underground passageways to link various MTR stations which are situated underground for the provision of pedestrian and commercial facilities; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will consider expeditiously commencing a relevant study and formulating an implementation timetable; and

(5) whether it has plans to, by drawing reference from the experience of overseas countries, formulate a comprehensive blueprint for underground space development to put below the ground as far as possible communal facilities such as sewage and waste treatment; if so, of the details (including the locations); if not, whether it will consider expeditiously commencing a relevant study?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong has been using underground space for commercial purpose and provision of community and transport facilities for many years. Most existing use of underground space have been developed under individual projects such as basement car parks, shopping arcades, pedestrian subways, railway stations

and tunnels. There lacks a holistic planning strategy from a macro and multi-level perspectives, such as comprehensive consideration of underground space creation and connection with the neighbouring developments. From overseas examples, planning and effective use of underground space could enhance connectivity with the surroundings, improve the urban environment at street level, create space for various commercial and public facilities, and optimise the development potential of our scarce land resources in a long term.

Underground space is a viable source of land supply, which can provide solution space for a broad variety of land uses. Utilising these hidden land resources may provide opportunities for the planning and development of Hong Kong, address the needs for community and commercial facilities, and tackle the traffic and environmental issues due to the lack of space in urban areas. In its report submitted to the Government on December 31, 2018, the Task Force on Land Supply recognised the multiple benefits of underground space development (USD) and recommended it as one of the medium-to-long term land supply options for priority studies and implementation.

Our responses to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan, having taken into account the inputs of relevant bureaux and departments, are as follows:

(1) According to the record of the Highways Department, the total length of pedestrian subways maintained by that department in various districts is currently around 32.9 kilometres. Please refer to Annex 1 for more details.

(2) Information on the floor area and percentage of commercial space situated below the ground at individual Government and private properties are recorded in their respective files. Relevant Government departments do not compile the concerned statistics on the total floor areas and percentages of commercial space situated below the ground at Government and private properties by districts.

(3) According to the information provided by the Transport Department, the numbers of car parking spaces by vehicle types and by districts in the past five years are provided in Annex 2. With respect to the total floor areas of the car parks situated above and below the ground at Government and private sites, relevant Government departments do not compile the concerned statistics.

(4) According to the Transport and Housing Bureau, generally speaking, the Government will invite the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to provide suitable accesses and pedestrian walkways during the planning and design of railway stations to facilitate the use of railway services. Depending on relevant factors including projected pedestrian flow, pedestrian connectivity, linkage with nearby buildings, impact on ground level shops, engineering technical feasibility, and impact on underground public utilities, etc., MTRCL will extend the accesses of railway stations to nearby areas and buildings through passageways where feasible. At some existing stations (e.g. Tsim Sha Tsui Station and Central Station) and stations under

construction (e.g. Kai Tak Station and Sung Wong Toi Station), there are underground pedestrian walkways linking the stations with nearby streets and buildings. Apart from providing convenient passageways to and from railway stations, this could also make better use of underground space. However, for elevated or at-grade railway stations such as the existing Tsuen Wan Station and the Hin Keng Station under construction, it may not be appropriate to provide underground pedestrian walkways.

(5) To exploit the potential of systematic use of underground space resources in a comprehensive manner, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) undertook a study entitled Territory-wide Study on Underground Space Development in the Urban Areas of Hong Kong – Feasibility Study (the Territory-wide Study) which was substantially completed in 2017. The findings of the Territory-wide Study revealed that there may be fewer constraints on developing underground space in new development areas and large-scale comprehensive development/redevelopment areas. Advanced and holistic planning for underground space development, particularly at the early planning stage, may be worthy of pursuance. The study findings also revealed that there is a potential and opportunity for developing underground space in new development projects and existing public open space from the technical perspective, which could help meet the district needs and enhance connectivity with the surroundings. As regards new development projects, the Government has planned on the approved Kai Tak Outline Zoning Plan the development of an underground shopping street in the Kai Tak Development for providing connections with the San Po Kong and Kowloon City areas respectively, thus enhancing integration between the new and old districts.

For USD in urban areas, the Territory-wide Study findings also indicated that the development potential of individual areas may be subject to various constraints in the existing urban context (e.g. land ownership issues and obstruction by underground structures). It would be comparatively difficult to develop underground space within existing private lots or build underground connections within its close proximity. To further assess the feasibility in a holistic manner and identify the key issues of USD in urban areas, the CEDD and the Planning Department jointly commenced a Pilot Study on Underground Space Development in Selected Strategic Urban Areas (the Pilot Study) in June 2015 to explore the potential of USD in four densely developed urban areas, and propose, having regard to the study findings, feasible conceptual development schemes for future implementation. The two departments completed the Stage Two Public Engagement activities of the Pilot Study from May to August this year, and collected views of relevant stakeholders and the public on holistic planning and design strategies of the proposed conceptual scheme for USD at the Kowloon Park, which was accorded development priority. Relevant Government departments are analysing the views and suggestions collected in the public engagement for refining the conceptual scheme and studying its technical feasibility and implementation modes in greater detail.

LCQ2: Chemicals used to disperse demonstrators

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Helena Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (November 20):

Question:

Since the eruption of the "anti-extradition to China" movement in June this year, the Police have fired thousands of tear gas rounds, used tear spray and sprayed coloured water from water cannon vehicles in densely-populated areas to disperse demonstrators. Some research findings have shown that persons who have inhaled tear gas will develop temporary symptoms such as tearing, coughing, runny nose and vomiting, and they may feel discomfort in their respiratory tracts or lungs for a period of as long as two weeks. Persons who have been hit by tear spray or coloured water will experience burning sensation of skin or temporary loss of sight. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will make public the models, places of origin and detailed composition of the tear gas rounds and tear spray currently used by the Police; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; whether it knows if tear gas rounds will give off cyanide and dioxins during the combustion process;

(2) whether the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will deploy staff to the areas concerned to carry out decontamination, so as to alleviate the health impacts of such chemicals on members of the public; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it studied, in the past six months, the impacts of the chemicals contained in tear gas rounds (in particular those made in China), tear spray and coloured water on food, potable water, the environment and ecology in the areas concerned; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will conduct such a study; whether it will, before it has been ascertained that the chemicals concerned will not cause serious health hazards to members of the public, suspend the use of such weapons?

Reply:

President,

The Government appeals to the public to express their demands in a peaceful and rational manner, to tolerate different views expressed in the community, and to respect the rule of law.

The Government fully understands the public's concern on the impact of

chemicals such as tear gas on health, food safety, drinking water and the environment. In consultation with the Security Bureau, the Department of Health (DH), the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Water Services Department (WSD) and the Hospital Authority (HA), consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon Helena Wong is as follows:

(1) Members of the public have the right to expression, speech and assembly. But they must do so in a peaceful and lawful manner. When illegal acts such as unlawful assemblies, arson, hurling petrol bombs and attacking other members of the public occur, the Police have a statutory duty to maintain public safety and public order.

On the procurement of equipment and ammunitions, the Police have been sourcing globally for safe and suitable equipment and ammunitions in accordance with the established procedures to meet their operational needs. As the procurement details of the equipment used by the Police involve operational deployment, the Police considered that it would be inappropriate to disclose procurement details as it would affect the Police's operational capability. The Police will continue to use tear gas in a safe manner in accordance with the guidelines issued by the manufacturer and internally.

In addition, it is understood that combustion of any substance could produce different chemicals, including cyanide and dioxin. The nature, quantity and concentration of chemicals produced would be subject to the duration, temperature of combustion and the substance itself. The DH and Hong Kong Poison Information Centre of the HA have reviewed relevant medical literature and scientific evidence but have found no literature or scientific evidence on dioxin poisoning cases caused by the use of tear gas. Also, given the short duration of combustion of tear gas canisters, any cyanide produced would quickly disperse in the air.

(2) After large-scale public order events, the FEHD would, subject to road conditions, arrange employees and cleansing service contractors (including cleansing workers) to provide street cleansing services.

The FEHD has issued guidelines to its employees and cleansing service contractors, including points to note and the use of personal protective equipment for cleansing the residues of chemicals. The guidelines stipulate, among others, that cleansing workers should wear face masks, rubber gloves, rubber aprons when conducting relevant work, and put on respirators (N95 type or compatible), goggles and caps if considered necessary. Cleansing workers should, upon discovery of dangerous goods or chemical waste, report to the FEHD which will then refer the case to the relevant departments. The FEHD also conducts routine and surprise inspections to check on its cleansing service contractors' performance.

(3) On the impact of tear gas, pepper based solution and colourants, insofar as food safety is concerned, the Centre for Food Safety has provided advice on its website to the general public on how to prevent contamination of food and handle contaminated food. Generally speaking, food may be contaminated by

different substances in the environment. Whether contaminants will affect food safety depends on a number of factors, such as the storage conditions of the food, the duration of exposure and the concentration of contaminants. To reduce the risk of food contamination, food should be properly stored in suitable places such as clean and covered food-grade containers. In general, contaminants on the surface of some kinds of food, such as fruits or vegetables, can be reduced by washing with running water. For the sake of prudence, food suspected to be contaminated or showing abnormality should not be consumed.

In respect of drinking water, the drinking water in Hong Kong are sourced from imported water from Dongjiang and rainwater from local catchments. Since the sources are located at country parks or remote areas, the drinking water would not be contaminated by chemicals. In addition, the drinking water in Hong Kong undergoes rigorous treatment processes in water treatment works and is supplied through concealed pipes to consumers whose internal plumbing systems are generally enclosed as well. Therefore, the risk of contaminating drinking water by chemicals is very low.

On the environmental aspects, tear gas is basically substance in the form of particulates and would disperse within localised areas. The EPD considered that it would not have significant impact on the overall air quality. Since June 2019, the EPD has not detected any abnormality in the air quality and water quality monitoring stations.

Lastly, the Police understand the community's concerns about the use of tear gas near residential buildings, and will take into account the safety and interests of the affected people as far as possible when using the tear gas. Before the operation, the Police will, as far as possible, maintain close contact with the nearby building management offices, commercial tenants and elderly homes through various channels to remind them of Police's possible actions in relation to the demonstration activities so that they can make arrangements accordingly. During the operation, the Police will also appeal to residents in the vicinity to pay attention to the situation through social media and press releases, and to close the windows and stay indoor in a safe place if necessary.

LCQ8: Suspected irritant odour incident in Tuen Mun

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (November 20):

Question:

It has been reported that on the afternoon of October 28 this year, a number of members of the public smelled a pungent odour akin to the smell of tear gas in the vicinity of Leung King Estate of Tuen Mun, and the odour subsequently spread to the vicinity of Tuen Mun Town Centre and the pier. A number of persons were unwell and made assistance calls for emergency ambulance service. Later on that day, the Police posted on a social media platform a message stating that the Police and fire personnel, after conducting inspections, could not ascertain the cause and origin of the odour. The Police also clarified that they had not used tear gas nor, as circulated on the Internet, conducted testing of any unknown gas, in Tuen Mun that day. Suspecting that the odour was associated with Police operations, some residents gathered outside Tai Hing Operational Base that night, and the rally eventually developed into confrontations between the Police and members of the public. The Police fired multiple rounds of tear gas to disperse the crowd, with some of the rounds landing on the podium or corridor of some private housing courts. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will continue to investigate the origin and cause of the aforesaid odour and if the odour was associated with tear gas; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it knows if the Chinese People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison (Hong Kong Garrison) used in its military sites on that day any equipment that would emanate pungent odour; if it knows of any such cases, of the details; if not, whether it will make enquiries with the Hong Kong Garrison; and

(3) whether the police officers concerned had taken into account the potential health hazards caused to innocent members of the public before firing tear gas rounds at residential buildings; if so, of the details; whether the Police will undertake not to adopt such a practice again; if they will not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

On the suspected irritant odour incident reported in different areas of Tuen Mun on October 28 this year, relevant government departments have been proactively following up and made responses. On November 1, the Government also issued a consolidated response on the follow-up and investigation work in respect of the incident. The follow-up work of various government departments on the above incident is summarised as follows:

(1) The Fire Services Department (FSD) received 18 emergency calls regarding a pungent odour in Tuen Mun district between 3.33pm and 4.25pm on October 28. FSD immediately despatched its personnel to investigate along Pui To Road, Ming Kum Road, Tin King Road, Shek Pai Tau Road, Ching Chung Koon Road, Tsun Wen Road and its vicinity, as well as entering the Tai Hing Operational Base

for investigation. No unusual smell was detected during the operation. On the following two days (October 29 and 30), FSD continued to conduct investigations into the relevant areas and again could not detect any unusual smell. FSD did not receive any further emergency calls from the public reporting unusual odours in these areas.

(2) Since 3.34 pm on October 28, the Police have received multiple reports that there was an irritant odour in the vicinity of Tuen Mun. Police and FSD officers attended the scene, yet initial investigations could not confirm the odour's cause and origin. The incident was classified as an odd smell found case. The Police clarified that they did not use tear gas or conduct testing of any unknown gas in Tuen Mun during daytime on that day, as circulated on the Internet.

(3) The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) received 10 complaints of an odd smell between 3.50pm and 4.59pm on October 28. Upon arrival on site at around 5.35pm and having touched base with FSD officers, EPD officers conducted investigations in the vicinity of Tai Hing Operational Base, Blossom Garden, Venice Garden, Tuen Mun North West Swimming Pool, Leung King Estate and Tin King Estate. No obvious smell or suspicious odour could be traced.

EPD officers conducted further investigations again on October 29 and 30 and November 1, with the area expanded to cover Kwong Shan Tsuen, the residential areas and schools nearest the Tsing Shan Firing Range, Kin Sang Estate, Shek Pai Tau Road, Shan King Estate, Tai Hing Estate, Chelsea Heights, Choy Yee Bridge, Ho Tin Stop, Tuen Mun Stop, Tuen Mun Heung Sze Wui Road and Siu Hei Stop. Drainage manhole covers as well as exhaust outlets of food premises and industrial buildings along the way in the area were also inspected in order to trace any possible residue smell or its source, but none was detected.

EPD analysed the meteorology and air quality monitoring data obtained on October 28. The South China region was affected by a southward moving northeast monsoon on that day. The wind direction in Hong Kong changed from easterly to north-westerly since noon and brought in an air mass with a higher background pollution level, resulting in higher than normal pollutant concentrations (including ozone, nitrogen dioxide, PM10 and PM2.5) since around noon. Elevated pollution levels in Hong Kong occur often in autumn and winter. Its impact could affect various regions in Hong Kong, not only Tuen Mun. Exposure to ozone can cause irritating effects on humans. However, the level of ozone recorded on October 28 was not exceptionally high for autumn and winter. The highest concentration recorded on that day was less than half of the highest value recorded this September. It is not conclusive that ozone was the main cause of the irritant odour.

The operation outside the Tai Hing Police Operational Base in Tuen Mun on the evening of October 28 was law enforcement action taken by the Police in accordance with their statutory duty. In view of such serious illegal acts as road blocking, unlawful assemblies and violent confrontations at the place during the time, the Police took action after conducting a risk assessment.

The operation concerned was not related to the suspected irritant odour reported during daytime.

My reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) Various government departments have thoroughly investigated the above incident. There has been no new finding. They will continue to monitor the situation.

(2) The Chinese People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison performs its defence functions and responsibilities in Hong Kong in strict accordance with the Basic Law and the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Garrisoning of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. We do not comment on defence functions which are not the affairs of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government.

(3) The Police stress that they would not need to use any force if members of the public could express their views in a peaceful and rational manner. The Police have the statutory duty to safeguard the public safety and public order of Hong Kong. It will be beneficial to all aspects if members of the public can co-operate with the Police in their law enforcement actions.

The Police use tear gas to stop crowd gatherings or illegal acts. Tear gas is basically suspended particulates. Most of the suspended particulates will be carried away in the air after tear gas is dispersed. Even if a trace amount of the particulates remain, the effect will be very limited. People affected by tear gas would be able to recover in a short period of time by leaving the area affected by tear gas, thoroughly washing with plenty of water and soap, and changing contaminated clothes.

The Police will take into account the safety and interests of people affected as far as possible when using tear gas. Before undertaking operations, the Police will, as far as they can, maintain close contact with the management offices of buildings, commercial tenants, elderly homes etc, nearby through different channels to remind them of the actions that may be taken in relation to demonstrations, so that they can make corresponding arrangements. During the operations, the Police will also make use of the social media and press releases to appeal to residents in the vicinity to pay attention to the situation, and close windows and stay in a safe indoor place if necessary.

Police reiterate that arrangements for underage occupants at PolyU remain

unchanged

Regarding the violent incidents in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), a number of rioters, some of whom are underage, still remain on campus.

Police today (November 20) reiterate that all persons under 18 years old leaving the campus are required to be photographed and have their personal particulars registered. They will not be arrested at scene but Police reserve every right to take any legal actions in the future.

Police emphasise again that a peaceful resolution is always our aim to solve the conflicts and appeal to the rioters to leave PolyU in a peaceful and orderly manner.

Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected unsafe laser pointers (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs seized 83 suspected unsafe laser pointers from seven retailers in Sham Shui Po in the past week. The retailers were suspected of contravening the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO) and its subsidiary legislation, the Consumer Goods Safety Regulation (CGSR).

Customs officers conducted a week-long spot check and test-buy operation between November 11 and 15 in Sham Shui Po. Officers found suspected unsafe models were put on sale at seven retail shops. Among the seven models involved, one was found to have no warning or caution and six others featured warning messages in English only. A total of 83 suspected unsafe laser pointers were seized during the operation and will be sent to a laboratory for safety testing.

Investigation is ongoing.

Under the CGSO, it is an offence to supply, manufacture or import into Hong Kong consumer goods unless the goods comply with the general safety requirements for consumer goods. According to the relevant safety standard for laser pointers, such products must have a relevant warning or caution attached.

Under the CGSR, where consumer goods or their packages are marked with warnings or cautions with respect to their safe keeping, use, consumption or disposal, such warnings or cautions shall be in both the English and Chinese languages.

The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year on first conviction, and \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years on subsequent conviction.

Customs reminds traders to comply with the requirements of the CGSO and the CGSR.

Customs also reminds members of the public to avoid eye contact with the light dots emitted by laser pointers under all circumstances as the beams emitted by laser pointers can pose eye and skin injuries to users.

Members of the public with information relating to unsafe consumer goods may make a report via Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

