



Food and Environmental Hygiene

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) was set up on January 1, 2000. The department is responsible for food safety control, import control on live food animals, management of food incidents as well as environmental hygiene services and facilities.

The FEHD delivers its services through the Centre for Food Safety, Environmental Hygiene Branch, and Administration and Development Branch.

Centre for Food Safety: The work of the Centre for Food Safety is to ensure that food available for human consumption is wholesome, hygienic, safe and properly labelled; to safeguard public health through testing and control of live food animals; and to advise the public on risk management measures in relation to food and public health matters. It also provides secretariat support to the Expert Committee on Food Safety, established to advise the centre in the formulation of food safety measures and review of food safety standards in the light of international practices, trends and developments.

The centre comprises three divisions: Food Surveillance and Control Division, Risk Assessment and Communication Division, and Administration Division.

The Food Surveillance and Control Division is the operational arm charged with the responsibility of enhancing food safety assurance. Its major aspects of work include food surveillance and food labelling inspections, and enforcing safety control on imported food. The division consists of the Risk Management Section, Veterinary Public Health Section, Slaughterhouse (Veterinary) Section, Food Import and Export Section, Food Surveillance and Complaint Section and Food Chemistry Section.

The Risk Assessment and Communication Division is the research and development arm charged with the responsibility of conducting risk assessment and providing food safety information to the public as well as the food industry. The division consists of the Risk Assessment Section, Risk Communication Section and Food Research Laboratory Section.

The Administration Division provides administrative support to the centre.

Risk Management: The centre monitors food incidents, both local and overseas. The Risk Management Section assesses the local impact, takes appropriate follow up actions and assists in the coordination of immediate response to food incidents taking into account the risks involved and the local situation. The section in collaboration with the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health investigates outbreaks of food poisoning and food borne infectious diseases in food premises, identifies the contributing factors in the outbreaks and assists in tracing source of suspected food. It also educates food handlers about food, personal and environmental hygiene.

Imported Food and Food Animals Control: Food and food animals control offices are set up at Man Kam To, Lok Ma Chau, Lok Ma Chau Spurline, Lo Wu, Sha Tau Kok, Hong Kong International Airport, Food Wholesale Markets at Western District and Cheung Sha Wan to monitor the safety of imported food.

Import requirements for food and live food animals are imposed for public health reasons. Live food animals and certain high risk imported food like milk, milk beverages, frozen confections, game, meat and poultry are governed by subsidiary legislation of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) and the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Ordinance (Cap. 139). Import of milk, milk beverages, frozen confections, game, meat and poultry is confined to sources recognised by the department. Staff of the Veterinary Public Health Section performs quarantine and inspection on food animals at the Man Kam To Animal Inspection Station.

Food Surveillance Programme: In line with the best international practice, the food surveillance programme has all along been based on risk assessment and scientific evidence. Under the food surveillance programme, about 65 000 samples are taken each year for chemical and microbiological testing to safeguard public health. The findings enable prevention and timely control of food risks. Compliance with regulatory requirements on food safety and labelling is also monitored through this programme.

Food surveillance reports are released to the public regularly. Clear explanations and interpretation are given to enhance risk communication with the public.

Risk Assessment: Risk assessment provides the scientific basis for risk management and risk communication. Laboratory researches conducted by the Food Research Laboratory provide support to the risk assessment studies and research work conducted by the centre and scientific data for risk assessment so obtained will be made use of in the formulation of food safety control strategies.

Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Based Food Safety Plan: Another means of achieving food safety is through the promotion of HACCP Based Food Safety Plan. It is a scientific and proactive approach in enhancing food safety. It emphasises the analysis and control of critical points along the food chain, followed by continuous monitoring and corrections wherever appropriate. Since prevention is better than cure, HACCP Based Food Safety Plan provides the greatest food safety assurance. The centre continues to introduce and promote the HACCP principles to the food trade.

Environmental Hygiene: The Environmental Hygiene Branch is responsible for the implementation and co-ordination of environmental hygiene services, management of public markets, hawker control and licensing matters.

The branch consists of a Headquarters Division and three Operations Divisions. The Headquarters Division is responsible for formulating departmental policies and guidelines on environmental hygiene services, licensing, market management and hawkker control. It advises the Liquor Licensing Board on liquor licensing matters and provides secretarial support to the board. It also processes applications for review to the appeal boards.

The three Operations Divisions are responsible for monitoring and management of environmental hygiene services in all districts throughout Hong Kong.

Public Cleansing: The FEHD provides cleansing services, including street sweeping, household waste collection and other cleansing work, by both the in-house workforce and cleansing contractors involving a total of 8 600 frontline operatives. For achieving greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness, the department has continued to contract out public cleansing services. At present, 69% of household waste collection service and 67% manual street cleansing service have been outsourced.

All streets are manually swept at least once everyday. In the main commercial and tourist areas, streets are swept an average of four times a day, and up to eight times a day in the busiest pedestrian areas.

In addition to manual sweeping, there are seven mechanical sweepers from the FEHD contractor responsible for the cleaning of highways, flyovers and central dividers. FEHD and cleansing contractors have a total of 108 street washing vehicles which operate day and night with the frequency of street washing ranging from on need basis to at least twice weekly depending on the nature of the area served. On gully emptying, the FEHD maintains both in-house staff and contractor's fleet to operate 9 gully emptying vehicles to provide regular service. The FEHD and its contractors operate a total of 235 modern refuse collection vehicles. Every day, about 5 160 tonnes of household waste are collected from over 3 100 FEHD refuse collection points and bin sites and other collection points in residential estates all over the territory. They are taken to the refuse transfer stations or landfills managed by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD).

In support of the Government's Policy Framework for the Management of Municipal Solid Waste (2005-2014), the FEHD provides recyclable collection service for the 2 150 sets of recyclable collection bins provided in schools, government clinics, public places and various venues under its purview as well as that of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department and EPD. Each set of the bins comprises three individual bins for the collection of waste paper, metal containers and plastic materials.

Public Toilets: Altogether 458 public toilets come under the department and about 60% of the toilets with high usage rate are provided with toilet attendants. In addition, there are 397 aqua privies in the New Territories and outlying islands. In order to upgrade old public toilets to the latest standard of provision, the FEHD has embarked on a toilet refurbishment programme. So far, 196 toilets have undergone face-lifting. To improve the sanitary condition of aqua privies, the FEHD has converted 124 aqua privies with high usage rate and situated in tourist hot spots and picnic sites into flushing toilets. It is anticipated that all aqua privies will be converted into flushing toilets by 2012/2013.

Enforcement: The Government enforces against common cleanliness offences (i.e. littering, spitting, unauthorised display of bills or posters and fouling of street by dog faeces) by issuing fixed penalty notices of \$1,500 to offenders. A "zero tolerance" approach is adopted in the enforcement.

Public Markets: As at the end of 2008, the FEHD operates a total of 80 public markets and 25 free standing

cooked food markets, with around 14 800 stalls selling foodstuffs and a whole range of clothing and daily necessities. The department is vested with the responsibility of properly managing these markets and keeping these markets tidy. Promotions are also conducted in selected markets to improve their business atmosphere.

Hawker Control: The FEHD is responsible for hawkker management and control in Hong Kong. There are, in essence, two categories of hawkker licences: fixed pitch hawkker licences and itinerant hawkker licences. As at the end of 2008, the number of fixed-pitch and itinerant hawkker licences were 6 241 and 302 respectively in the urban area, and 348 and 244 respectively in the New Territories. The Food and Health Bureau and the Department are jointly reviewing the policy on hawkker licensing, including exploring the feasibility of re-issuing new hawkker licences and relaxing the requirements for succession and transfer of cooked food stall hawkker licences without compromising environmental hygiene.

Hawker Control Teams are deployed to control illegal hawking activities and to minimise nuisances created by street trading either by hawkkers or by illegal extensions of shops into the street area. The district Hawker Control Teams consist of 191 squads (125 in Hong Kong and Kowloon and 66 in the New Territories), including the Hawker Control Task Force which comprises 27 squads (15 in Hong Kong and Kowloon and 12 in the New Territories). The task force mounts special operations at major hawkker black spots and augments hawkker control work in the districts. It also works a special overnight shift to tackle illegal hawking activities during the late-night and early-morning hours.

Slaughterhouses: The FEHD is responsible for the monitoring of slaughterhouses to ensure that their operations meet the required hygiene and environmental standards. There are three licensed slaughterhouses, namely Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse, Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse and Cheung Chau Slaughterhouse, with a total daily throughput of about 4 230 pigs, 80 cattle and 30 goats. Veterinary officers deployed to work in the slaughterhouses are responsible for the monitoring of the health condition of food animals and the examination of drug residues. While field officers stationed at the slaughterhouses conduct body fluid and tissue sampling of food animals for testing and perform ante-mortem inspection, health inspectors inspect food animals after slaughtering; monitor the operation of slaughterhouses and arrangement of meat delivery, etc., so as to ensure only meat fit for human consumption is released for sale in the market.

Pest Control: Pest control work, such as the control of rodents, mosquitoes and other arthropod pests with medical importance, is carried out by the Pest Control Teams of the FEHD. It aims to prevent and control the breeding of disease vectors. The methodology in pest control is continuously reviewed to ensure effectiveness and efficacy in abating the disease vectors. The Pest Control Advisory Section provides professional advice on the prevention and control of public health pests to government departments and the public.

Cemeteries and Crematoria: The FEHD serves the public by providing services on cremation and burial of body and skeleton remains. It operates six government crematoria and 11 public cemeteries. It also oversees the management of 28 private cemeteries.

Administration and Development: The Administration and Development Branch is responsible for departmental administration, including staff management and development, financial management, information technology, planning and implementation of capital works projects, outsourcing of services, complaints management, public information and public education.

Health Education: The FEHD is responsible for the promotion of food safety and environmental hygiene. It operates the Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre (HEERC) in Kowloon Park and the Communication Resource Unit (CRU) in Fa Yuen Street Municipal Services Building.

The HEERC comprises a 1 100-square-metre exhibition area, a 400-square-metre outdoor health education garden, a resource centre holding a collection of over 6 000 items of publications and a lecture room. The CRU houses an exhibition hall, public and trade corners as well as a multi-purpose room. It has a rich collection of resource materials with local and international flavours on food safety and pest control for the reference of the public.

The two units support a wide range of health education services including holding public exhibitions and seminars, providing library reference service for publications on

hygiene-related topics and audio-visual materials. The CRU also provides lending service for audio-visual learning/teaching aids to organisations and schools.

Public Education and Publicity: Public education and publicity play an important role in the FEHD's activities and initiatives, forming part of an integrated approach to ensuring food safety and improving environmental hygiene. Messages including "Keep Clean", "Food Safety", "Anti-rodent" and "Anti-mosquito" are disseminated through various channels, such as television and radio Announcements in the Public Interests, posters and banners, pamphlets and leaflets, departmental website, outreach programmes, school talks, seminars, workshops, exhibitions, Mobile Exhibition Centre (a publicity vehicle), etc. Educational and publicity efforts are also directed at various target groups, e.g. members of the food trade, students, the elderly and the general public.