

Food Safety 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, the Environmental Hygiene Branch, the Administration and Development Branch and the Private Columbaria Affairs Office.

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 secretarial 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.

Risk assessment, risk management and risk communication form the risk analysis framework central to contemporary food safety control. The Centre comprises Risk Management Division, Risk Assessment and Communication Division, Corporate and System Management Division, and Administration Division.

The Risk Management 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 responsibilities 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 Corporate and System Management Division is responsible for formulating long term strategies for information technology-enabled business transformation and mapping out strategic proposals on re-engineering business

processes, operational procedures and information management, with a view to developing computerised systems that can better support data analysis and risk profiling.

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 co-ordination 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 local food premises, identifies the contributing factors in the outbreaks and assists in tracing the 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, Shenzhen Bay, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, Heung Yuen Wai, Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link West Kowloon Station, Hong Kong International Airport, Kwai Chung Customhouse, Western Wholesale Food Market and Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market 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, poultry and eggs 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, poultry and eggs is confined to sources recognised by the department. Staff of the Centre perform inspections 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, radiological 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, research work and total diet study conducted by the Centre. Scientific data for risk assessment so obtained will be made use of in the formulation of food safety control strategies.

Good Hygiene Practices (GHPs) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP)-based Food Safety Plan: Another means of achieving food safety is through the promotion of the GHPs and HACCP-based Food Safety Plan. The purpose of practising good hygiene is to prevent contamination hazards in food, making sure that the food served is safe to eat. GHPs also focuses on the need of on-going training. HACCP is a scientific and proactive approach in enhancing food safety, emphasising the analysis and control of critical points in the food production process, followed by continuous monitoring and making corrections wherever appropriate. The Centre continues to introduce and promote the GHPs and HACCP principles to the food trade so as to help food business operators to ensure food safety and safeguard consumers' health.

Risk Communication: The Centre has set up committees and forums to facilitate regular risk communications with experts, academics, members of the food trade, consumers and the public. The Risk Communication Section operates through supporting these regular communication forums, organising various events and functions, producing publications and various forms of training and community resource materials and disseminating food safety messages via social media platforms including CFS' Facebook page, Instagram page and YouTube channel. The Risk Communication Section also gathers food safety related opinions from consumers' perspective through the Consumer Liaison Group and conducts other communication activities for building up and maintaining a trusting and constructive tripartite relationship with the public and the trade. It also operates the Communication Resource Unit (CRU) in the FEHD Nam Cheong Offices and Vehicle Depot which has a collection of resource materials on food safety for public reference. The CRU organises various programmes to promote food safety and use of nutrition labelling and provides lending service for audio-visual learning/teaching aids to organisations and schools.

ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE BRANCH

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 hawker 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 about 13 000 frontline operatives as at the end of 2020. For achieving greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness, the department has continued to contract out public cleansing services. At present, 78 per cent of household waste collection service and 81 per cent of manual street cleansing service have been outsourced.

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

In addition to manual sweeping, there are 10 mechanical sweepers from the FEHD contractor responsible for the cleaning of highways, flyovers and central dividers. As at the end of 2020, the FEHD and cleansing contractors had a total of 118 street washing vehicles which operate day and night with the frequency of street washing ranging from on need basis to daily depending on the nature of the area served. On gully emptying, the FEHD maintained both in-house staff and contractor's fleet to operate eight gully emptying vehicles to provide regular service. The FEHD and its contractors operated a total of 255 refuse collection vehicles. Every day, about 6 100 tonnes of household waste were collected from 2 930 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 line with the Government's policy to collect recyclable items for recycling, up to September 30, 2020, the FEHD provides recyclables collection service for the 2 756 sets of recyclables collection bins provided in schools, government clinics, public places and various venues under its purview as well as that of the Water Supplies Department and EPD. Each set of the bins comprises individual compartments for the collection of waste paper, metal and plastic materials. EPD took over the management of recycling bins in public places such as roadsides from the FEHD starting from October 1, 2020.

Public Toilets: As at the end of 2020, altogether 808 public toilets came under the FEHD and about 35 per cent of the toilets with high usage rate were provided with toilet attendants. In addition, there were 40 aqua privies in the New Territories and outlying islands. In order to upgrade old public toilets to the latest standard of provision with modern facilities, the FEHD has embarked on a toilet refurbishment programme. So far, 405 projects have been completed. To improve the sanitary condition of aqua privies, the FEHD implemented a programme to convert aqua privies into flushing toilets by phases starting from 2005. Final phase of the conversion programme was completed by the end of 2014 and a total of 441 aqua privies have been converted to flushing toilets.

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.

Food and Other Trades: The FEHD is the licensing authority for food businesses (namely restaurants, food factories, bakeries, fresh provision shops, factory canteens, siu mei and lo mei shops, frozen confection factories, milk factories, cold stores, composite food shops and sale of restricted foods - including online sale of restricted foods), certain trades (namely places of public entertainment, commercial bathhouses, private swimming pools, funeral parlours, undertaker businesses, slaughterhouses and offensive trades) and karaoke establishments in licensed restaurants in Hong Kong. The FEHD performs regular inspections to licensed and permitted premises to ensure that licence and permit holders comply with licensing requirements and conditions as well as the law. As at the end of 2020, there were 39 789 licensed and permitted food premises, 1 793 licensed other trade premises and 78 karaoke establishments in licensed restaurants in Hong Kong.

Public Markets: As at the end of 2020, the FEHD operated a total of 75 public markets and 23 free standing cooked food markets, with around 14 000 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 environment.

To enhance the vibrancy of public markets, the FEHD has introduced service trades, snack shops and bakeries to certain markets with vacant stalls since mid-2009. At the end of 2020, 135 service trade stalls, 10 snack stalls and one bakery stall were let out.

Hawker Control: The FEHD is responsible for hawker management and control in Hong Kong. There are, in essence, two categories of hawker licences: fixed-pitch hawker licences and itinerant hawker licences. As at the end of 2020, the number of fixed-pitch and itinerant hawker licences were 5 015 and 163 respectively in the urban area,

and 231 and 185 respectively in the New Territories. Hawker Control Teams are deployed to control illegal hawking activities and to minimise nuisances created by street trading either by hawkers or by illegal extension of shops into the street area.

Re-allocation of vacant hawker pitches: After completion of the Hawker Assistance Scheme, as at June 30, 2019, there were 435 hawker pitches within or outside the 43 fixed-pitch hawker areas which were released through the surrender of hawker licences or due to other reasons and thus suitable for re-allocation. Having consulted the Legislative Council, seven District Councils (or their committees) and the relevant stakeholders, the FEHD decided to apportion the above vacant pitches equally among four categories of eligible applicants, namely licensed newspaper hawkers, licensed itinerant hawkers, currently registered assistants with five years or more experience and members of the general public satisfying certain basic criteria. The 435 vacant fixed hawker pitches (other classes) were open for application from September 30 to October 20, 2019. Out of 14 126 applications received, 12 788 applicants were found eligible during the period. A computer random sequencing cum manual balloting was held on November 26, 2019 and a priority list for re-allocation of fixed hawker pitches was established. Selection of vacant hawker pitches was commenced on December 10, 2019. As at the end of 2020, 431 vacant hawker pitches have been selected.

Slaughterhouses: The FEHD is responsible for the monitoring of slaughterhouses to ensure that their operations meet the required hygiene and environmental standards. There are two licensed slaughterhouses, namely Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse and Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse, with a total daily throughput of about 2 100 pigs, 40 cattles and four goats in 2020. Veterinary officers and field officers deployed to work in the slaughterhouses are responsible for the surveillance on agricultural chemical and veterinary drug residues, monitoring of the health condition of food animals and animal welfare, providing professional support to post-mortem inspection, and conducting sampling of food animals for testing. 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 public health importance, is carried out by both the FEHD in-house and contractor pest control teams. 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 controlling 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 skeletal remains. As at the end of 2020, it operated six government crematoria, 10 public cemeteries and 10 public columbaria, and oversaw the management of 27 private cemeteries.

In addition to the above traditional burial services, the FEHD also promotes more environmentally-friendly and sustainable ways of handling cremains by encouraging the public to scatter ashes of their ascendants in its Gardens of Remembrance or at designated Hong Kong waters, and provides the Internet Memorial Service website and its mobile app. The mobile app has functions for personalised profile settings, and notifications and sharing with social media for the public to pay tribute to their lost loved ones anytime and anywhere. The FEHD also set up a thematic website on green burial to facilitate public access to information on relevant services. The Green Burial Central Register has been launched to enable members of the public to register early their wish for green burial. As at the end of 2020, the FEHD ran 12 Gardens of Remembrance, and more than 5 700 members of the public signed up in Green Burial Central Register.

Moreover, the first facility for keeping abortuses of less than 24 weeks' gestation managed by the FEHD, the Garden of Forever Love, has been commissioned.

ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT BRANCH

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

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.

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 4 500 items of publications and a lecture room.

The HEERC supports a wide range of health education services including holding public exhibitions and talks, and providing publications and audio-visual materials for reference.

Public Education and Publicity: Public education and publicity play an important role in the FEHD's work, forming part of an integrated approach to ensuring food safety and improving environmental hygiene. Messages promoting environmental hygiene, food safety and green burial are disseminated through various channels, such as Television and Radio Announcements in the Public Interest, departmental websites, Facebook and Instagram pages, banners, posters, pamphlets and leaflets. In addition to the promotion via the Mobile Exhibition Centre (a publicity

vehicle), outreach programmes, school talks, seminars, workshops and exhibitions are also organised to convey the messages to the public and various target groups, e.g. members of the food trade, students, the elderly, etc.

PRIVATE COLUMBARIA AFFAIRS OFFICE (PCAO)

The PCAO is responsible for handling matters relating to the implementation of the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630) (the Ordinance) and providing executive support to the Private Columbaria Licensing Board (the Licensing Board). The Ordinance, which introduces a licensing scheme to regulate the operation of private columbaria, came into effect on June 30, 2017. Under the Ordinance, the operation of a private columbarium in Hong Kong must be covered by a specified instrument, viz a licence, an exemption or a temporary suspension of liability, and only private columbaria that have obtained a licence may sell or newly let out niches.

The Licensing Board was established on September 8, 2017 to regulate the operation and management of private columbaria, including considering and determining applications for specified instruments.

The PCAO consists of the following sections:

Branch Administration Unit: It provides administrative support to the PCAO.

Private Columbaria Licensing Board Secretariat: It provides secretariat support to the Licensing Board.

Private Columbaria Licensing Team: It provides executive support to the Licensing Board for the implementation of the licensing regime of private columbaria. Its duties include handling the applications for specified instruments, interviewing applicants, conducting site inspections for verification of application particulars, consulting the bureaux/departments concerned, preparation of necessary documents for the Licensing Board for determining applications, etc.

Private Columbaria Enforcement Team: It monitors the operation of private columbaria in Hong Kong and takes enforcement action against illegal columbaria. It carries out inspections on those granted with specified instruments to ensure that statutory requirements under the Ordinance and conditions imposed on the specified instruments are being complied with. In cases where the columbaria are no longer in operation, it ensures that the ashes interred are properly disposed of in accordance with the Ordinance.

Financial Monitoring Team: It monitors the compliance of the private columbarium licensees with the licence conditions relating to the financial aspects.