

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, and Administration Division.

The Risk Management Division (RMD) 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, enforcing safety control on imported food and food export arrangement and certification. 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, Food Chemistry Section, Information Technology Section and RMD Administration 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 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 Live Food Animals Control: Food control offices are set up at Man Kam To, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, 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. Offices are also set up at Lok Ma Chau, Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, Lo Wu, Sha Tau Kok, Shenzhen Bay, Heung Yuen Wai and Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link West Kowloon Station to tackle inbound persons illegally bringing regulated food into Hong Kong.

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 live 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 and Instagram pages, WhatsApp 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 13 300 frontline operatives as at the end of 2023. For achieving greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness, the department has continued to contract out public cleansing services. At present, 80 per cent of household waste collection service and 82 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 11 mechanical sweepers from the FEHD contractor responsible for the cleaning of highways, flyovers and central dividers. As at the end of 2023, the FEHD and cleansing contractors had a total of 105 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 nine gully emptying vehicles to provide regular service. The FEHD and its contractors operated a total of 289 refuse collection vehicles. Every day, about 5 820 tonnes of household waste were collected from 3 393 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.

Public Toilets: As at the end of 2023, altogether 810 public toilets came under the FEHD. About 36 per cent of the toilets had a high utilization rate and were provided with toilet attendant services. In addition, there were 33 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. As at the end of 2023, 557 projects have been completed. The FEHD took the initiative to put a "Smart Public Toilet System" on trial in two public toilets of Tsim Sha Tsui and Wan Chai in May 2021, and gradually expanded to another 12 public toilets starting from the third quarter of the same year.

Enforcement: The amended Fixed Penalty Ordinance has been implemented on October 22, 2023. The level of fixed penalty for depositing of litter or waste, spitting, displaying

bills or posters without permission in public places, and fouling of street by dog faeces has been raised to \$3,000, while the fixed penalty level for shop front extension and illegal disposal of construction waste or a large amount of other wastes has been raised to \$6,000. The Government has stepped up publicity and public education on the new fixed penalty levels. Members of the public are also urged to observe the law and to maintain a hygienic environment through concerted efforts.

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 2023, there were 46 176 licensed and permitted food premises, 1 916 licensed other trade premises and 78 karaoke establishments in licensed restaurants in Hong Kong.

Public Markets: As at the end of 2023, the FEHD operated a total of 74 public markets and 22 free standing cooked food markets, with around 13 500 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, light refreshment and bakery stalls to certain markets with vacant stalls since mid-2009. At the end of 2023, 136 service trade stalls, 12 light refreshment 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 2023, the number of fixed-pitch and itinerant hawker licences were 5 053 and 270 respectively. 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.

The FEHD has completed a round of re-allocation of vacant hawker pitches in late 2022, no re-allocation exercise was arranged again in 2023. The FEHD will consider opening suitable vacant hawker pitches for application by eligible persons in a timely manner.

Enforcement: In order to tackle obstruction problem in public

places caused by shop front extension (SFE) in a more effective manner, the FEHD and the Police conducted joint operations against SFE under a new enforcement strategy. Apart from stepping up prosecution against the offenders, obstructive items illegally placed on streets were removed, thereby increasing the shop operators' cost of non-compliance. As at the end of 2023, the FEHD and the Police had mounted a total of 1 612 new mode of joint enforcement operations, and the SFE situation in black spots of various districts had remarkably improved.

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 3 100 pigs, 30 cattles and two goats in 2023. Veterinary officers and field officers deployed to work in the slaughterhouses are responsible for the surveillance on agricultural chemical and veterinary drug residues in food animals, monitoring the health condition and welfare of food animals before slaughter, providing professional support to post-mortem inspection and collecting samples from food animals for disease surveillance. 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. Based on the principle of integrated pest management, the methodology in pest control is continuously reviewed to ensure effectiveness and efficacy in controlling the disease vectors. The FEHD 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 2023, it operated six government crematoria, 10 public cemeteries, 12 public columbaria, two keeping facilities and one cremation facility for abortuses, and oversaw the management of 27 private cemeteries. Among them, Cape Collinson-San Ha Columbarium was commissioned on July 19, 2023, providing 25 340 new extendable niches.

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 2023, the FEHD ran 13 Gardens of Remembrance, and 11 838 members of the public signed up in Green Burial Central Register.

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, environmental hygiene and green burial. 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 and a multi-purpose room 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, improving environmental hygiene and promoting green burial. 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.