

LCQ16: Central air-conditioning systems in games hall complexes and public libraries

Following is a question by the Hon Joseph Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, at the Legislative Council today (July 4):

Question:

Regarding the hygiene conditions of the central air-conditioning systems in games hall complexes and public libraries under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the frequency for cleaning the central air-conditioning systems (including the ventilation ducts) in the aforesaid premises and the areas covered, as well as the duration of the temporary closure of the premises for cleaning; the schedule for cleaning the ventilation ducts in premises which are open at all times (such as the ticketing concourse of the Hong Kong Coliseum);

(b) whether it has monitored the hygiene conditions of the central air-conditioning systems in the aforesaid premises (such as by conducting sample tests); if it has, of the details, and the locations at which the samples for tests are taken and the items tested; and

(c) given that a group of about 40 athletes of the Chinese National Team were taken ill because of the unhygienic conditions of the central air-conditioning system in an indoor training centre in Beijing in January this year, whether it has, by making reference to the "Regulations on Central Air-conditioning Ventilation Systems in Public Premises" implemented by the Mainland's Ministry of Health with effect from March 1, 2006, drawn up relevant legislation to stipulate the annual frequency of inspection and replacement of the parts and components of the central air-conditioning systems in indoor premises; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) attaches great importance to the air quality in its indoor venues. At present, the cleaning and maintenance of the central

air-conditioning systems in various LCSD sports centres and public libraries are carried out with the assistance of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD). Once every two months, the EMSD conducts routine checking, cleaning and maintenance of metal air filters in air handling units (AHUs) and fan coil units. Comprehensive cleaning of the components of AHUs, including fans, cooling coils and accessories, is conducted on an annual to triennial basis so as to ensure the proper operation of the air-conditioning systems. The frequency of cleaning depends on the actual operating conditions of the AHUs concerned.

For LCSD sports centres, two regular maintenance days are scheduled for either the first and third or the second and fourth Mondays of every month. The maintenance process takes several hours to complete, during which the air-conditioning systems will be affected. In view of this, the LCSD makes careful arrangements to avoid concurrent suspension of services for maintenance purposes in sports centres in the same district so as to minimise the inconvenience caused to the public. On the other hand, the air-conditioning maintenance works of booking offices and lobbies are carried out during off-peak opening hours of the sports centres. In respect of public libraries, the cleaning of air-conditioning equipment usually takes place on closing days or after daily closing of the libraries to avoid interruption of library services.

(b) The EMSD conducts sample tests of the central air-conditioning systems in LCSD venues in accordance with the recommendations of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) measurements, including that of carbon dioxide, respirable suspended particulates, airborne bacteria and radon, are taken once every two years in different air distribution zones and crowded areas in sports centres and public libraries under LCSD to ensure compliance with the IAQ levels recommended by the EPD. If the readings of respirable suspended particulates and airborne bacteria have exceeded or are likely to exceed the recommended levels, the EMSD will arrange with the LCSD for the cleaning of air ducts in specified areas. With the coordination of the LCSD, the EMSD will normally carry out the cleaning of air ducts on the maintenance days and regular closing days of sports centres and public libraries respectively, aiming for prompt completion within the same day. As for the cleaning of metal air filters, the venues need not be closed for cleaning under normal circumstances because such work does not affect the daily operations of the venues. For those venues with fresh water type water-cooled air-conditioning systems, such as the recently renovated Kowloon Public Library, water samples are taken monthly and tri-monthly for Heterotrophic Colony Count (Total Bacterial Count) and Legionella Count respectively at locations where warmed water enters cooling towers by an accredited laboratory in accordance with the "Code of Practice for Water-cooled Air Conditioning

Systems" issued by the EMSD.

(c) Currently, there is no statutory requirement specifying the frequency of checking and replacement of components to be carried out annually for air-conditioning systems in indoor venues of Hong Kong. However, the "Guidance Notes for the Management of Indoor Air Quality in Offices and Public Places" issued by the Government in 2003 provide detailed guidelines on the improvement and management of indoor air quality. These guidelines serve similar purposes as those of the "Regulations on Central Air-conditioning Ventilation Systems in Public Premises" issued by the Mainland's Ministry of Health.

Ends/Wednesday, July 4, 2007