

LCQ12: Tree management

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Following is a question by the Hon Tanya Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 20):

Question:

At the special meeting of the Finance Committee on March 27, 2009, the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services indicated that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) had to inspect and manage more than 700,000 trees. Moreover, it has been reported that certain LCSD staff complained about the substantial increase in their workload as a result of the Government stepping up tree inspection work recently. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the respective number of trees regularly inspected and managed by LCSD staff, as well as the reasons for some trees not being inspected regularly;
- (b) of the current detailed procedures and contents of such procedures for keeping records, writing reports, taking follow-up actions as well as storing the relevant files in relation to tree inspections by LCSD staff;
- (c) of the daily average number of trees that each LCSD staff member concerned needs to inspect and conserve;
- (d) whether LCSD has increased the manpower concerned and created temporary posts to tie in with the enhanced tree inspection work; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (e) of the current number of LCSD staff who are in possession of internationally recognised qualifications in tree management and caring; of the contents of the training provided by LCSD to its staff on tree inspection; and whether LCSD will strengthen or revise the training contents to meet the present needs; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) manages and maintains about 760,000 trees in public parks and roadside amenity areas under its purview. It inspects all these trees regularly.

(b) Staff of the LCSD will record the relevant information of the tree inspected (such as its species, location, etc.) and the date of the inspection. If the tree inspected has a problem, a report on it will be prepared and its conditions of growth recorded. Information on any abnormal defoliation signs, leaning trunk or infestation by pests and diseases, etc. will be recorded for identification of the required tree care work which will then be carried out accordingly.

(c) As trees vary in size, distribution, growing environment, health condition and the caring work required, we cannot calculate the average number of trees examined by the inspection staff on a daily basis. By way of reference, in venues with on-site LCSD staff, the trees planted therein are inspected by the on-site staff every day. For venues without on-site staff, the trees planted therein are inspected routinely by the staff who look after the venues. The trees not listed on the Register of Old and Valuable Trees are inspected at least once a year, while those listed on the Register are inspected at least twice a year by staff of the LCSD.

(d) The LCSD is currently reviewing its manpower resources for tree care work and the training needs of staff. The scope of the review covers the organisation of the tree teams and their deployment, the operation of the tree teams in the urban areas and the New Territories, enhancement of training for staff in the tree teams, the deployment policy and succession plan for staff in the tree teams, etc. Upon completion of the review, we will seek additional resources for tree care work as necessary.

(e) There are currently 42 Certified Arborists of the International Society of Arboriculture in the LCSD. Among them, seven have attended overseas training and obtained other certificates in arboriculture. Apart from the above 42 Certified Arborists, four other LCSD staff members have also attended courses relevant to arboriculture abroad and obtained the associated certificates. As regards arboriculture training for staff, the LCSD has been strengthening and revising its training programmes to meet the operational needs of its staff. Such training programmes include internal training courses provided by the LCSD's Training Section on tree climbing, tree inspection, pruning, operation of arboriculture instruments (e.g. chain saw), etc. The LCSD is planning to increase the number of internal training

places. Moreover, the LCSD also invites overseas experts to Hong Kong every year to conduct training courses on arboriculture for its staff, including training on tree risk assessment. The LCSD is also planning to allocate more resources for training so as to invite more local and overseas arboriculture experts to hold seminars and arboriculture workshops to continuously update its staff with arboricultural knowledge. The LCSD will continue to arrange for its staff to attend overseas diploma or certificate courses with a view to enhancing their qualifications on arboriculture and enabling them to learn from the relevant experience of other countries.

Ends/Wednesday, May 20, 2009

Issued at HKT 15:23

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