

Report No. 45 of the Director of Audit — Chapter 8

THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS IN DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS TO KEEP HONG KONG CLEAN

Summary

1. The Government's efforts to keep Hong Kong clean have a long history. The first clean-up operation was launched in 1948 under the Clean Hong Kong Campaign. This was followed by the Keep Hong Kong Clean Campaign from 1970 to 1999 and the launching of a three-year Clean Hong Kong Programme in December 2000. In May 2003, after the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in March 2003, the Chief Executive announced the setting up of Team Clean, chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, to develop and take forward proposals for entrenching a high level of public and environmental hygiene in Hong Kong. On 9 August 2003, Team Clean published its final report putting forward longer-term and sustainable measures on a number of areas. Government bureaux and departments were tasked to develop sustainable systems to sustain Team Clean's intensive efforts. After the dissolution of Team Clean on 31 August 2003, the Steering Committee on Team Clean Follow Up, chaired by the Secretary for Home Affairs, was established in November 2003 to follow up on all Team Clean's proposed measures.

2. The Audit Commission (Audit) has conducted a review of the extent of success of the Government's efforts in developing sustainable systems and getting the community involved to keep Hong Kong clean. This report contains the audit findings of the review of the Government's efforts in developing sustainable systems to keep Hong Kong clean.

Enforcement regimes

3. *Fixed penalty on public cleanliness offences.* The fixed penalty on public cleanliness offences (i.e. spitting, littering, dog fouling, and unauthorised display of bills and posters) was raised from \$600 to \$1,500 on 26 June 2003. Audit has found that, up to March 2005, among the 23 enforcement units in the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Intelligence Unit (IU) issued 12,539 (or 35%) fixed penalty notices. The plain-clothes officers in the IU working on a full-time basis at strategic

locations are much more effective in taking enforcement actions. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene should consider deploying more plain-clothes officers working on a full-time basis to further strengthen the enforcement actions against public cleanliness offences.*

4. ***Marking Scheme for Tenancy Enforcement in public rental estates and interim housing estates.*** Under the Marking Scheme for Tenancy Enforcement in public rental estates and interim housing estates implemented since 1 August 2003, the Housing Department has allotted penalty points to the households for their committed misdeeds. Audit has found that, during the period from 1 August 2003 to 31 March 2005: (a) there were 12 public housing estates (PHEs) with averages of 48 or more misdeeds for every 10,000 tenants (i.e. twice the overall average of 24 misdeeds committed in the 160 PHEs); (b) the average number of misdeeds of the 40 least hygienic PHEs was 5.6 times that of the 40 most hygienic PHEs; and (c) the households involved in the 44 cases of throwing objects from heights were each allotted 7 penalty points despite the significant differences in the nature of the objects thrown from heights. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Housing should: (a) step up enforcement efforts on the least hygienic PHEs; (b) devise incentive schemes to award the most hygienic PHEs; and (c) consider classifying the misdeeds of throwing objects from heights by the severity of the consequences, and allot penalty points commensurate with the seriousness of the offence.*

5. ***Demerit points system for public markets.*** To enhance the procedures for termination of tenancy for repeated breaches of the law, Team Clean recommended that a demerit points system (DPS) should be developed for public markets in early 2004. Under the DPS, the accumulation of a prescribed number of demerit points within a specified period would result in termination of tenancy. Audit has found that there is a delay in introducing the DPS for public markets. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene should develop and implement the DPS for public markets as soon as possible.*

6. ***Marking Scheme for Tenancy Enforcement in Housing Authority markets.*** On 1 August 2003, the Housing Authority (HA) introduced a Marking Scheme for Tenancy Enforcement in HA markets to sustain a clean, hygienic and tidy environment. Audit has found that the Marking Scheme only addresses the provision of not causing obstructions in the public area, but not other environmental hygiene related provisions in the market stall tenancy agreement. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Housing should consider enhancing the Marking Scheme for Tenancy Enforcement in HA markets by incorporating breaches of all environmental hygiene related provisions in the market stall tenancy agreement into the scheme.*

Monitoring systems

7. **Priority district hygiene blackspots.** The three phases of clean-up operations of priority district hygiene blackspots have been successful in bringing about quick and visible improvement. Audit has found that hygiene blackspots are not evenly distributed among the districts and the progress of their clearance varies significantly. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Home Affairs should develop a sustainable monitoring system for the eradication of hygiene blackspots at the district level.*

8. **Rapid Response System.** The Integrated Call Centre (ICC) hotline is in operation for the public to report environmental blackspots and other hygiene problems. A Rapid Response System (RRS) has been put in place to ensure quick response, enhance departmental coordination and strengthen the monitoring of hygiene problems. Audit has found that, as at 31 March 2005, there were significant discrepancies in the number of outstanding cases recorded by the ICC and the FEHD because of their different classification of hygiene-related cases and the outdated Complaint Management Information System (CMIS) records of the FEHD. In addition, some District Offices did not duly monitor the long-outstanding complaint cases. *Audit has recommended that: (a) the Director of Home Affairs should, in consultation with the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene and the Head, Efficiency Unit, unify the classification of hygiene-related complaints under the RRS; (b) the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene should regularly update the CMIS records; and (c) the Director of Home Affairs should establish proper procedures for monitoring the outstanding complaint cases.*

9. **Community Cleanliness Index.** The Community Cleanliness Index (CCI) measures objectively the improvement/deterioration of the hygiene conditions in Hong Kong. The HAD released to the public, on a quarterly basis, the indices for each of the seven venue types, the indices for each of the 18 districts and the overall CCI for Hong Kong. Audit has found that the existing arrangement of releasing only the CCI but not the overall score of the whole of Hong Kong has the drawback that the public have no knowledge of the extent of the cleanliness level of Hong Kong. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Home Affairs should consider releasing to the public the overall score of the cleanliness level of the whole of Hong Kong.*

Incentive schemes

10. **Incentive Scheme for licensed food premises.** In February 2004, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the implementation of the Incentive Scheme for Hygiene Improvement in Food Premises with a commitment of \$310 million for granting loans to food business operators. Up to 30 June 2005, only 60 food business operators (i.e. 1% of the estimated 6,200 applicants) had applied for loans under the first

three rounds of application. Audit has found that, notwithstanding the poor response, the FEHD has not carried out a review of the implementation of the Incentive Scheme. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene should: (a) consider conducting a review of the implementation of the Incentive Scheme; and (b) ascertain the needs of food business operators for financial assistance.*

11. ***Open Categorisation Scheme for licensed food premises.*** In November 2000, the FEHD announced the discontinuation of the Open Categorisation Scheme (OCS) launched by the two former Provisional Municipal Councils in late 1999. In January 2001, a new OCS for licensed food premises was proposed. Under the new OCS, the hygiene conditions of all food premises would be graded and the grading would be given to the food premises in printed form for display. Team Clean proposed to bring forward the implementation of the new OCS to July 2004 and publish the resulting hygiene grading in January 2005. Audit has found that the implementation of the new OCS is behind schedule. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene should consider introducing as soon as possible the new OCS to facilitate consumers to make informed choices of food establishments.*

Response from the Administration

12. The Administration generally agrees with the audit recommendations.

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