EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two months, an encouraging start has been made, and good results achieved, in Phase I of the Team Clean programme to transform Hong Kong into a truly clean and hygienic city.

Stringent enforcement of cleanliness offences has helped make our streets, markets and back lanes cleaner; special clean-up operations in old tenements and public housing estates have provided a more pleasant living environment for residents; enhanced public education has raised awareness of the need for proper hygiene at home and in the community; long-standing problems with drains and pipes have been identified and in many cases rectified; public facilities and outdoor furniture, roads, walkways, footpaths and bridges have been cleaned and spruced up.

Feedback has been positive. An opinion survey conducted in mid-July found that 91% of respondents considered Hong Kong to be cleaner than before SARS, while just over 90% considered that the ‘zero tolerance’ approach to cleanliness and hygiene offences, and the higher $1,500 fixed penalty have had a deterrent effect. Encouragingly, about 97% of respondents said they would be more willing to keep the environment clean if they found it cleaner than before.

It is on this basis that we must push ahead with longer-term, sustainable measures in Phase II of Team Clean efforts in the areas of personal, home and community hygiene.
Personal Hygiene

The increased penalty of $1,500 for cleanliness offences, coupled with the ‘zero tolerance’ approach, has brought quick and visible results. We believe this enhanced enforcement regime will continue to work adequately for first-time, one-off offenders. But for repeat offenders, more stringent measures will be needed.

We have considered various options, including the imposition of community service orders and criminal convictions for recalcitrant offenders. While criminalising repeat offences would have a strong deterrent effect, such a move (which could include prison terms) is excessive at this stage and not a recommended option. We have also considered publishing offenders’ names together with their personal particulars but decided that we would not pursue these enhanced measures for the time being. However, we will give further consideration to the exercise of the existing authority on repeat offenders.

We do, however, believe there is merit in pursuing higher fines and community service orders for repeat offenders. In this regard, we propose that the four cleanliness offences of spitting, littering, dog-fouling and the unauthorised display of bills and posters be all treated as one type of offence under the scheme. In other words, a person who has been issued with a fixed penalty for littering, will be regarded as a repeat offender if he is subsequently caught committing another offence such as spitting or dog-fouling.

Stronger deterrents are one way to tackle community hygiene problems, many of which stem from a lack of civic-mindedness and thoughtless, sometimes irresponsible, behaviour. But it is better to tackle the problem at source, and that can only be done by changing long-established mindsets in the community. And the earlier the better.
We will adopt a new approach to strengthen civic and health education in schools, which will include new elements in school subjects, the incorporation of civic and health issues into school projects, regular reviews of learning goals for civic responsibility and healthy living, and more relevant life events in moral and civic education. Schools will be helped by the Education and Manpower Bureau to assess and review their programmes on an annual basis. Students will be given more opportunities to ‘learn by doing’ through such initiatives as an annual Pledge Day that will encourage a collective school commitment to healthy living and a clean campus and community environment, and involvement in district-based projects to clean up or monitor hygiene blackspots in their areas.

**Home Hygiene**

Home hygiene measures fall under four categories: building management and maintenance, building design, urban design and public housing estates.

**Building management and maintenance**

By far the biggest problem with building management is the reluctance of the strata-titled holders in older tenements to form Owners Corporations, or to hire management companies to ensure their buildings are maintained properly. There are about 8,000 tenements in this situation. Despite repeated and concerted efforts by Government to address this problem, the individual owners of apartments in these buildings have failed to take responsibility for the proper management and upkeep of their buildings.
We believe it is now necessary to make it mandatory for property owners to form Owners’ Corporations and to appoint building managers, to ensure the proper upkeep of their properties. We will put in place a number of support measures to help this process, including encouraging the development of an all-round building management and maintenance industry, recognition of good management and maintenance practices and financial assistance such as loans or matching grants for owners with genuine difficulties meeting the costs of building management and maintenance. The Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands will consult the public on a package of measures before the end of 2003, with a view for implementation from 2004 onwards, subject to the outcome of public consultation.

Building design

The SARS outbreak at Amoy Gardens prompted a rethink on building design, particularly drainage and ventilation. We have reviewed the current regulations relating to such areas as drainage, plumbing and sanitary fittings and found them to be adequate and on par with international standards. However, problems have arisen as a result of improper alteration or installation of pipes and fittings, and a lack of regular inspection and maintenance. We will step up controls on the quality and standard of drainage works. This will require certain works such as alterations to common drainage pipes or those involving the subdivision of units, to be carried out by qualified contractors. We will review current standards and technical guidelines for drainage works and amend if necessary. The Buildings Department has also set up a new working group to draw on industry experience in building design issues, with a view to bringing in measures that will help improve environmental hygiene.
Urban design

The SARS outbreak also prompted discussions about how the congested nature of our city may have played a role in the transmission of the disease. While we cannot establish a direct relationship between urban design and the spread of SARS, we do believe that good urban design can contribute to a healthy lifestyle and environment.

We will introduce measures to apply urban design guidelines to improve the general physical environment, particularly in regards to air circulation; introduce an air ventilation assessment for future major planning and development proposals; and reduce development densities where appropriate and feasible.

Some of the urban design guidelines will include: the gradation of development height profiles consistent with topography and local character; the provision of breezeways and visual corridors for better aeration of the city; and layout planning that allows for more open space.

Public housing estates

Concerted efforts to clean up hygiene blackspots in public housing estates have involved a number of measures – enhanced refuse collection, drainage inspections, elimination of illegal cooked food hawking. These efforts have had a marked effect on improving general cleanliness in housing estates. A New Cleansing Culture may have sprouted, but we need to make sure it firmly takes root.
To build on the good results achieved, and to improve hygiene and living conditions in public housing estates, we introduced a Marking Scheme for tenancy enforcement, a new way to tackle the problem of illegal cooked food hawking, extend the Drainage Ambassador Scheme and enhance urban and building design.

The Marking Scheme was introduced on August 1. Public housing tenants who accumulate 16 demerit points within two years will be subject to eviction action.

Illegal cooked food hawking will be tackled under a new mode of inter-departmental collaboration according to the seriousness of the problem. ‘Category A’ blackspots with 10 or more illegal cooked food stalls will be handled by joint operations involving the Housing Department, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Police. ‘Category B’ blackspots with less than 10 illegal stalls will be subjected to surprise raids and intensive patrols by the Housing Department’s Mobile Operations Unit. Local management staff will deal with the less problematic, ‘Category C’ blackspots.

Estate Drainage Ambassadors were appointed under Team Clean Phase I to inspect the internal drainage pipes of older housing blocks and those occupied mainly by senior citizens. Their work is almost done. Phase II of the scheme will begin in September and will involve 113 estates not covered under Phase I. Inspection and rectification work should be completed by May 2004.

In line with the previously-mentioned proposals to improve urban and building design, a series of measures will be introduced to improve the design of new public housing estates. The main aims will include more open space, better ventilation, more greenery and ways to rejuvenate older housing estates.
Community Hygiene

We have dealt with six areas under community hygiene, namely: public markets; licensed food premises; avian influenza; dengue fever and other mosquito-transmitted diseases; civet cats and other wild animals; and, miscellaneous issues.

Public markets

The cleanliness, or the lack of it, in our markets has been a long-standing problem. Markets always seem to have wet, slippery and dirty floors. There is bad hygiene around cooked food areas, rampant littering, dirty walls as well as feathers and faeces from live poultry.

The hygiene of our markets has a strong bearing on public health. We need to do more to improve in this area.

During Team Clean Phase I, contractors were employed to thoroughly clean and disinfect the common areas of markets and individual stall areas. This free service will end in December. To maintain this cleaning work, we propose to impose a tenancy condition that market stalls be cleaned on a particular day of each month. Failure to comply will be regarded as a breach of tenancy condition. We expect the first cleansing day to be held in November.

The enforcement regime for market tenants will be streamlined, and there will be a more rigorous enforcement of legislation and tenancy conditions. A demerit points system will be introduced. Market tenants who accumulate a certain number of points within a 12-month period will have their tenancy terminated. Tenants whose
tenancies have been revoked will also be prevented from bidding for others stalls for one year. We will clearly delineate the circumstances for prosecution and the issue of verbal warnings. Tenancy conditions of markets and cooked food stalls will be reviewed with a view to removing those conditions that replicate existing legal provisions.

Licensed food premises

Some licensed food premises take great pride in the cleanliness of their establishments. But unfortunately, not all do. We want to ensure that everyone in Hong Kong has a healthy and enjoyable dining experience. We will enhance the hygiene standards for all food premises, whether a five-star restaurant, or a roadside snack shop.

We have identified a number of problems with the current licensing and regulatory regime. These include inadequate licensing requirements (e.g. food factory licences), insufficient control of unauthorised building works (e.g. water cooling towers, exhaust fans), abuse of the provisional licensing system, an ineffective sanction system, a lack of responsibility for hygiene offences committed by staff and constraints on publicising unhygienic food premises.

We have proposed a number of measures to address these issues. These include: tightening licensing requirements for food factories; refusal to issue a new licence or allow a licence transfer until all unauthorised building works have been removed from a premises; cancellation of a provisional licence for non-compliance of requirements relating to sanitary hardware; making licensees responsible (under the Demerit Points System) for hygiene breaches committed by their staff.
We also propose to widely publicise repeat offenders by publishing in local newspapers and other avenues the names and photographs of convicted restaurants or shops, including photographs shown in court as evidence of the offences committed.

We will offer an incentive scheme to help restaurant and food shop owners refurbish their kitchens and toilets and install other facilities such as food storage cabinets or dish-washing machines.

To recognise high standards, and to help consumers make informed choices, we will bring forward the introduction of the Open Categorisation Scheme to July 2004 and publish hygiene grades from January 2005. Premises will be graded according to set criteria and will be required to post the hygiene grading at a conspicuous location in their premises.

**Avian influenza**

The avian influenza outbreak in 1997 claimed six lives and led to drastic culling of poultry in Hong Kong. The SARS outbreak taught us another bitter lesson about the dangers posed to humans by mutated animal viruses.

The H5N1 avian influenza virus is a known danger to humans. There is a distinct possibility that this virus could mutate further to create a dire public health threat to Hong Kong. Every day, more than 100,000 live poultry are transported through Hong Kong to 820 retailers. But Hong Kong’s love affair with live poultry carries serious public health risks. We need urgent and resolute action to reduce contacts between humans and poultry, and thus minimise the risk of an outbreak.
of avian influenza. In doing so, we will need to balance public health needs with those of people involved in the live poultry trade.

To tackle this issue, we have so far identified four broad options: a complete ban on the retailing and rearing of live poultry; a ban on the retailing of live poultry, but the sale of chilled or frozen poultry; a ban on the retailing of live poultry, but the sale of ‘warm’ slaughtered poultry; the segregation of poultry from customers at the retail level. We are open to further ideas and will begin public consultation on the matter from December 2003. Depending on public reaction, we expect to announce a decision on the way forward in 2004.

_Dengue fever and other mosquito-transmitted diseases_

A spate of cases in Ma Wan alerted us to the problem of dengue fever becoming endemic in Hong Kong. Enhanced preventive measures to stop mosquito breeding have proven successful, with a drop in the monthly ovitrap index from 35.6% to 16.8% year-on-year. We will build on this good work.

Enhanced monitoring is now taking place in selected housing estates. This will help gather data that can be used to highlight the importance of anti-mosquito measures in the home. Laboratory testing will be carried out to assess the infection risks of mosquitoes carrying dengue viruses. This will enable us to upgrade risk reduction strategies. We have also enhanced co-operation on information sharing between health authorities in Hong Kong, Macau and the Mainland to provide an early alert to dengue fever cases in our respective jurisdictions.
Civet cats and other wild animals

All game meat imported into Hong Kong is controlled by legislation. The import and sale of civet cat meat was suspended after a recent scientific study found the coronavirus causing SARS present in the Masked Palm Civet. Live civets have not been imported into Hong Kong since 1994 as a rabies control measure.

Clearly, more scientific research is needed on the health risks posed by live wild animals and their meat. We will continue to monitor such research and have no intention of relaxing the current restrictions on the importation of live civet cats.

Miscellaneous issues

Miscellaneous issues cover such problems as water seepage, excessive rubbish, unhygienic worksites and smelly village toilets.

Water seepage in apartments can be a complicated matter involving a number of causes that may be quite difficult to trace. Sometimes, property owners are unwilling to shoulder the responsibility for investigating and eliminating the seepage problem. The current method for dealing with water seepage can involve up to three Government departments (Food and Environmental Hygiene, Buildings and Water Supplies) and take more than three months to complete the investigation process, even though we still fail in most cases to identify the causes of the seepage. We propose to set up a joint office between the Buildings Department and Food and Environmental Hygiene Department to tackle the problem. Because of resource constraints, investigations may be outsourced to private surveyors to provide a more effective and
efficient service. We will also publish a comprehensive set of guidelines to help the public better deal with water seepage problems.

Excessive rubbish can be a health hazard as well as a nuisance. We will not tolerate excessive accumulation of rubbish. For severe cases, we will take immediate action to remove the refuse and prosecute, where possible, those responsible. We will also, where necessary, provide counselling to those people who have an abnormal fixation for collecting rubbish and junk.

Construction site management need to ensure that their work areas do not have an adverse effect on the neighbouring environment. We will strengthen control measures to ensure site cleanliness and the elimination of mosquito breeding sites. Poor performance or non-compliance will be recorded in a contractor’s performance record. Contractors who repeatedly commit public health offences will be prevented from bidding for government contracts for a specified time. Conviction records will also be taken into consideration for tender assessment purposes.

Aqua privies are village-type dry latrines. There are more than 500 of them in the New Territories and outlying islands. They are often smelly and unhygienic. To improve public hygiene, we will accelerate the conversion of about 100 high-use aqua privies to flushing toilets with proper hand-washing facilities starting from next financial year.
Sustainability

All of our proposed measures will not count for much unless we are able to build on and sustain the momentum generated during Phase I of Team Clean’s efforts. To do this we need to tackle old problems with new methods, boost community involvement and public education, and ensure proper institutional arrangements are put in place.

During Phase I, we have successfully piloted new ways to deal with long-standing problems. We must further fortify inter-departmental co-ordination and establish effective methods for handling environmental hygiene problems.

We will achieve this by reinforcing our ‘zero tolerance’ approach, streamlining enforcement procedures, cutting red tape, breaking traditional enforcement boundaries, establishing an enhanced cost recovery mechanism and strengthening co-ordination among departments by empowering district administrations to devise their own measures to deal with specific problems.

These new modalities will be monitored and publicised by the Home Affairs Department, and updated where necessary.

But Team Clean’s biggest challenge has not been to develop new policies or measures to improve environmental hygiene. Rather, it has been the formulation of effective ways to promote civic responsibility and to inculcate in our people a genuine commitment to society at large. We need to establish a system in which community involvement becomes the driving force of sustained environmental hygiene improvements in Hong Kong. Every resident of Hong Kong has a role to play in this regard.
We are looking at ways to enhance current work on civic education and will make special efforts to harness the energy, enthusiasm and ideas of our youth – the civic leaders of tomorrow. We will develop special education programmes on good hygiene practices for new arrivals, domestic helpers, street users and the users of public facilities. The Home Affairs Bureau has consulted the community on the most appropriate way to commemorate Hong Kong’s battle against SARS and will submit a report on various options to the Chief Executive in August.

To encourage and foster a sense of community pride, we will continue to form volunteer District Hygiene Squads (more than 105 have been set up in the past two months) to play an important role in the upkeep of neighbourhood hygiene. These squads will carry out such duties as inspecting and monitoring hygiene conditions, identifying problematic areas for follow up action and spreading Team Clean messages. We will launch a Hong Kong-wide monthly cleaning day. Closed-circuit televisions will be installed with local community support in hygiene blackspots to find out how, why and by whom persistent hygiene problems are caused. We will also launch a Community Cleanliness Index to benchmark hygiene conditions in each of the 18 districts and track subsequent efforts to maintain or improve district hygiene conditions.

District revitalisation schemes will, subject to community consultation, be implemented to help shop operators comply with relevant laws and regulations, tidy up sites and improve pedestrian access. Loans will be offered to help them bear costs of repairs and refurbishment.

To sustain all of these efforts, various institutional arrangements will be put in place to facilitate implementation of Phase II measures, to monitor and give effect to inter-departmental co-ordination and to maintain momentum in the community, and within government, for environmental hygiene improvements.
The Home Affairs Department will play a central coordinating role for inter-departmental efforts in district hygiene improvement, as well as community involvement and civic education. The Secretary for Home Affairs will present quarterly progress reports to the Policy Committee led by the Chief Secretary for Administration, on the progress of Phase II measures. And for the next six months, as a transitional arrangement, the Chief Secretary for Administration’s Office will continue to monitor the overall implementation of Team Clean measures. Ultimate responsibility for the delivery of Phase II measures will lie with the relevant Principal Officials.