

2020.05.12

12 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding disinfecting of public areas (OQ.118/2020)

Will the Minister advise what chemicals are being used to disinfect high-traffic areas around the Island later this month as a response to the COVID-19 outbreak; and will he state what environmental impact assessment, if any, has been undertaken on the effects of this operation on local wildlife?

Deputy K.C. Lewis (The Minister for Infrastructure):

The chemicals to be used are sodium hypochlorite with a similar antifoam agent in a 0.1 per cent diluted form with water and will be a soft wash sprayed by hand lances. Although the disinfectant machines have a 1,000-litre capacity, this volume is clean water and is only mixed with a partially-diluted mix of the disinfectant at the pump hose. This sodium hypochlorite is a dilute bleach and is exactly the same disinfectant as supplied and currently used by the Island's dairy industry and the Island's hospital.

4.12.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Concerns have been raised understandably by members of the public and I am sure politicians, like myself, that this may have a consequence, unintended or otherwise, on local wildlife. So, for example, if it wipes out certain types of insect that could have a knock-on effect on the food chain and disrupt the ecosystem. Can the Minister answer the question about what impact assessment has been done about the environmental impact that this spraying would have?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

There has been a misunderstanding somewhere along the line. This is primarily designed for disinfecting toilets and sadly stairwells of car parks that have been used for the same purpose. This is just a very, very mild bleach. There seems to be a misunderstanding with the term "high-traffic areas". This is more of a generic term meaning an area that is highly used, which in our case are going to be toilets and car parks, *et cetera*, nothing to do with spraying the streets as they did in China, which is what a lot of people have referred to. As I say, this is just a generic term, it is very mild diluted bleach, impact assessments have been done, but likewise if anyone in their home has used bleach you must not get it on your clothing and certainly not on your hands and obviously safety clothing and eye protection must be worn.

4.12.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given that there will be perhaps an increased use of these hypochlorites and that chlorine compounds can react in water supplies to produce dioxins, can the Minister assure us that measures of dioxin levels will be monitored carefully so that we can prevent any unwanted contamination for our aquatic life?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Absolutely; all the staff and contractors have been fully trained in its use and, I repeat, it is a very, very mild bleach, but obviously we have to be careful with water courses and any areas that are very sensitive.

4.12.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does that training include the monitoring of dioxin levels then or how will that be monitored?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Dioxin levels; that would be monitored by our colleagues at Environment, but, as I say, I repeat, all the staff have been very well trained.

4.12.4 Deputy C.S. Alves:

The Minister has at various times mentioned a mild bleach solution. Is the Minister aware that there are people who are allergic to bleach and that this could trigger off allergic reactions or other, for example, asthma attacks as well? Can the Minister give some reassurance that this solution will be washed away sufficiently so that it would not cause asthma attacks or allergic reactions, for example?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, indeed. If, for instance, a toilet facility is being cleaned by our own people or contractors, then the area is sealed off, the area is pressure-cleaned and well ventilated and cleared before anyone is admitted.

4.12.5 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Would the Minister explain why this deep-cleaning regime that he is implementing appears to have been instigated by private companies with equipment donated by private companies?

[11:15]

Why was the Government of Jersey unable to make this decision and provide its own equipment?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

The equipment used by the private company is a matter for them. We do have our own equipment, which is purchased with our own budget.

4.12.6 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Would the Minister confirm that this initiative was the initiative of the Infrastructure Department rather than the initiative of a private company?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It was more of a joint venture. It was initially brought to the attention of Infrastructure that this equipment was available and an arrangement was made that we would purchase one and the company concerned had funding for their own equipment.

4.12.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

It does follow on from Deputy Morel's question. We were told from the *Bailiwick Express*, so even though I am Minister for the Environment, Assistant Minister, our Department found out via the *Bailiwick Express* that a bank in Jersey donated 2 disinfection packages, which would be mounted on vehicles. The question is why does one need to mount disinfecting packages and equipment on top of a vehicle simply to clean toilets and car parks, which should be happening routinely anyway? Why has this new equipment come in that seems to differ from business as usual?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It is business as usual. We are mounting it on a truck because that is the most convenient way to carry it from A to B. It is not a new truck; we found an old truck, which was in part of our cleaning

regime. The vehicle is over 2 years old, and it was used for cleaning toilets, so we have just mounted this new equipment on an existing truck because it was more prudent to do so.

The Bailiff:

Before moving on, we have gone through 12 questions of 23. Given the number remaining and the time available to us, in my judgment it would not be appropriate to continue to allow supplementary questions, so the questioner will have the usual final supplementary but anyone with follow-on questions will not be able to ask a supplementary to those follow-on questions.