

DRINKING WATER SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Interim Endorsement Mechanism for
Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards**

PURPOSE

This paper aims to seek view from the Drinking Water Safety Advisory Committee (“Committee”) on the proposed interim endorsement mechanism for any update or revision to the Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards.

BACKGROUND

2. At present, Hong Kong adopts the World Health Organization’s (WHO’s) Guideline Values/Provisional Guideline Values of 92 parameters as Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards (“the Standards”).

3. In 2016, the Water Supplies Department (“WSD”) commissioned consultancy studies to review comprehensively international practices with a view to establishing the Standards. The studies comprise two stages. The Stage 1 study, covering the WHO’s metal parameters, was completed in 2017. Having taken into account the consultant’s findings and advice from the International Expert Panel on Drinking Water Safety (“IEP”), the corresponding Guideline Values (“GVs”) / Provisional Guideline Values (“PGVs”) for the 12 metal parameters in the WHO Guidelines have been adopted in the Standards, and the IEP has also recommended that WSD should collect sufficient local data of 3 to 5 years for review of the Standards for 6 metal parameters¹. The Stage 2 study, covering both the WHO’s non-metal parameters² as well as some non-WHO parameters, is still on-going and will be completed by end-2018. By then, a proposal will be put forward to

¹ The recommendation has been included as part of the Action Plan for Enhancing Drinking Water Safety in Hong Kong. Under the Enhanced Water Quality Monitoring Programme, water samples would be randomly collected from consumer’s taps for testing of six metals viz. antimony, cadmium, chromium, copper, lead and nickel.

² The corresponding GV/PGVs for non-metal parameters in WHO Guidelines have been adopted in the Standards in the interim as recommended by the IEP

recommend parameters to be included in or removed from the Standards; and for the former, the corresponding standards to be adopted together with the sampling protocols. There is thus a need to set up a mechanism for endorsing these changes to the Standards which will be reviewed and, where necessary, revised from time to time.

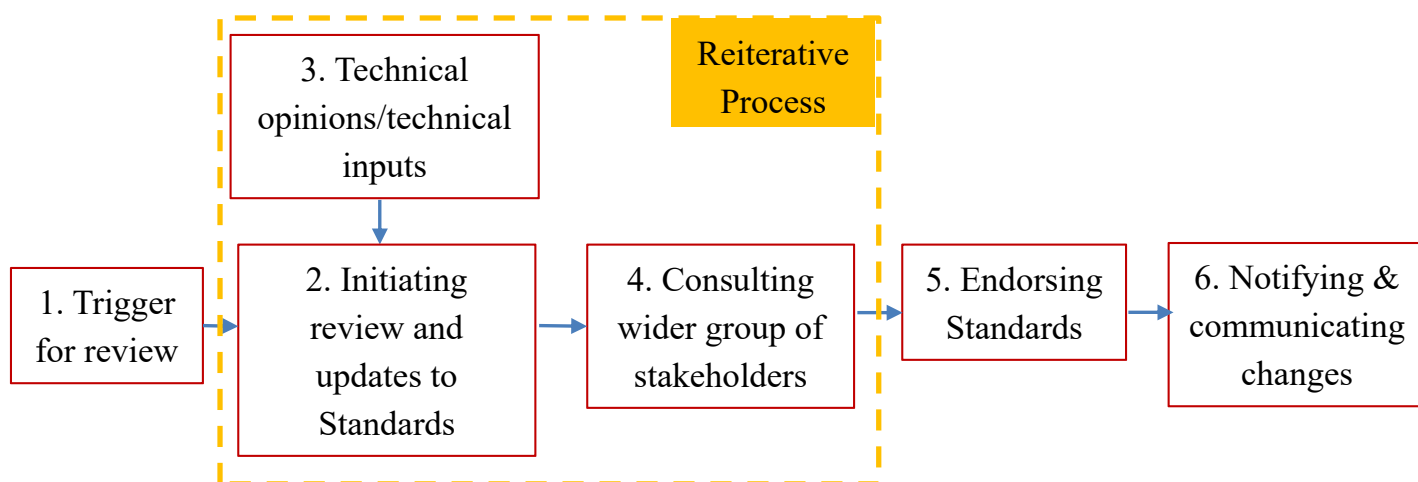
4. Recently, the Development Bureau (“DEVB”) has commissioned an in-depth consultancy study with a view to formulating and recommending a suitable drinking water safety regulatory regime for Hong Kong, which may be effected through legislative/administrative/a combination of legislative and administrative means. Similar to most water safety regulatory regimes adopted by the leading jurisdictions, the proposed drinking water safety regulatory regime will include an endorsement mechanism for the Standards. It is expected that the detailed study will take 18 months to complete. Subject to the outcome of the consultancy study, if there is a need to enact a new legislation or revise an existing Ordinance to effect the regulatory framework, a long timeframe, say 5 years or more, is envisaged to complete the necessary legislative procedures for mandating, among others elements to be included under legislation, the endorsement mechanism for the Standards.

INTERIM ARRANGEMENT

5. As it would take time to effect a permanent endorsement mechanism as explained above, there is a need to devise an interim endorsement mechanism for effecting changes to the Standards.

6. We have reviewed the overseas experience of setting drinking water standards³ as well as the local practice for setting standards of similar nature including food, air, noise, etc. Based on the outcome of the review, six key steps for endorsing drinking water quality standards are identified as shown in the diagram below:-

³ With reference to WHO, the European Union and six other leading jurisdictions including the United Kingdom (England and Wales), Australia (Victoria), New Zealand, Singapore, Canada (Ontario) and the United States.



7. Based on the above protocol of six key steps, we propose to adopt an interim endorsement mechanism as detailed below:-

Step 1 – Trigger for review

7.1 A review to the Standards will be triggered under the following circumstances:-

- (a) The WHO's guidelines or the drinking water standards commonly adopted by other leading jurisdictions are updated;
- (b) New waterborne pathogens/contaminants emerge;
- (c) New scientific research and findings on the drinking water standards are published;
- (d) There are public health concerns or complaints on water quality which requires tightening up of the Standards; or
- (e) Recommendations are made by the Committee, or other circumstances deemed appropriate.

Step 2 – Initiating review and updates to the Standards

7.2 A dedicated team has been set up in the DEVB to oversee, inter alia, drinking water safety issues in Hong Kong. It is therefore logical and appropriate for the dedicated team to initiate review and updates for the Standards when any of the circumstances mentioned in 7.1 above arises.

Step 3 – Providing opinions/technical inputs to the Standards

7.3 Given WSD's expertise in the entire water collection, treatment, supply and distribution system, it is considered appropriate the review be undertaken

by WSD for putting up a draft proposal of any change to the Standards.

7.4 With reference to international practice⁴, there is usually a dedicated technical committee/advisory body set up to provide opinions and technical inputs to drinking water standards prior to their endorsement. The Committee has been set up to perform, amongst others, this function which has been included in its Terms of Reference.

Step 4 – Consulting wider group of stakeholders

7.5 Taking into account the expert advice from the Committee, the DEVB in collaboration with the WSD will finalise the proposal and take lead to reach out to relevant government departments and impacted groups, such as the plumbing trade, to seek their views. As the proposal is likely to be too technical for understanding by the general public, public consultation will in general not be pursued unless it may give rise to great public concern. We will consult the Committee on the need to conduct public consultation on a case-by-case basis.

7.6 Where necessary, the feedback obtained from consultation would be put back to Step 2 and 3 for review and revision of the draft proposal.

Step 5 – Endorsing the Standards

7.7 The endorser under this interim arrangement is preferably to be the same official as the one who will be empowered with similar responsibility under the legislation for the water safety regulatory regime, if needed and enacted in future. With reference to similar overseas experience and local legislation, the endorser is normally pitched at Secretary or Director level.

7.8 In order to show the Government's political commitment over drinking water safety, the Secretary for Development is proposed to take up the role of endorser.

Step 6 – Notifying and communicating changes

7.9 With a view to enhancing transparency, the DEVB will notify the

⁴ With reference to the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Canada and the United States

public of the endorsed changes to the Standards through issuance of press release and publication at its website.

WAY FORWARD

8. The final arrangement of the endorsement mechanism for the Standards is being formulated under the DEVB's consultancy study as mentioned in para. 4 above. We will consult the Committee of the proposed mechanism in due course.

ADVICE SOUGHT

9. Members are invited to offer views on the interim endorsement mechanism for the Standards.

Development Bureau
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