

Transcript of STH's remarks on drug driving

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Transport and Housing (STH), Ms Eva Cheng, on initial proposals to combat drug driving at a stand-up session this afternoon (July 19) (English portion):

STH: We are now proposing a basket of measures to combat drug driving. Our inter-departmental group has studied the regime of Australia and the UK and has come up with a series of measures. One of the very important proposals we are now taking forward is to adopt a "zero tolerance" arrangement for six kinds of commonly abused drugs. We are also going to improve on the existing provisions in the Road Traffic Ordinance concerning what we call drug driving. I think all in all, we are hoping to give a very clear message to the community - we are considering this matter very seriously and will take forward these proposals. We will be consulting the public during the summer and aim to take forward the legislative proposals to Legco in the next legislative year.

Reporter: (How will the illegal drugs be handled differently and will the police be empowered to conduct random tests)

STH: At the moment, we are not considering random test because the device is not available yet. As I have just explained, the impairment test that the UK and Australia have adopted, takes about 20 to 30 minutes to complete the procedure. So if we are talking about roadside random tests - this may not be practicable at this juncture.

On illegal drug, we are adopting a "zero tolerance" attitude towards these six drugs of abuse. There are other drugs, of course, which people abuse, like cough syrup and those kinds of things. So this will be caught by this provision (section 39) in the existing ordinance, which will also be improved on. We will have an objective test, the impairment

test, whoever cannot pass the impairment test will need to provide the Police with bodily fluid so that in a very scientific way, they will be able to determine whether in their bodies they have taken certain drugs, and whether the ability to drive safely has been affected. So that will be the provision concerning other drugs in the ordinance.

Reporter: (About ordinary medication)

STH: If you take those ordinary medication in accordance with a doctor's advice, especially there will be medication, so-called drowsiness, you are not supposed to handle machinery. A person will need to act according to the doctor's advice, and we don't think this will catch normal people. The impairment test concerns various steps. They will look at the pupils' reaction, they will need to conduct tests like walking a straight line and turning. They will need to count numbers and do certain postures. So this has already been developed and well implemented in other regimes. So we think that we will be able to screen up those who have been taking drugs because of their needs. We are also providing a defence in the law, that is, if they are acting in accordance with medical advice, and they have unknowingly taken drugs that have led to the identification through the test, that will be a defence we are suggesting that we provide a defence in the law.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

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