

Letterhead of CLEAR THE AIR

Mrs Constance Li,
Secretary,
Sub-committee on the Fixed Penalty Fine,
Legislative Council

16 November 2000

Fax: 2509 0775

Dear Mrs Li,

Sub-Committee on the Fixed Penalty for Smoky Vehicles

CLEAR THE AIR is a charity committed to promoting the introduction and implementation of measures to significantly reduce air pollution in Hong Kong. We are disappointed that we are unable to present our views to the members of the LegCo Sub-Committee on Subsidiary Legislation reviewing the implementation date of the increased Fixed Penalty Fine for smoky vehicles. We hope you can forward our written views to the members on this issue.

CLEAR THE AIR has advocated an increase in the smoky vehicle fine for a number of years. Many of our members are smoky vehicle spotters, or have families whose health is affected by air pollution. In April 1998 CLEAR THE AIR submitted 30,000 signatures to the Chief Executive urging him to increase smoky vehicle fines. In November 1998 we organised a March for Clean Air attended by 500 people. In May 1999 we organised a Wear A Mask day to protest at the Government's failure to tackle air pollution. While we were pleased that LegCo voted to increase smoky vehicle fines, we were concerned to note the implementation would be delayed by 6 months. It now appears that some members would like to delay the implementation of the fine even longer.

There is tremendous public concern on air pollution. There was widespread public outrage in March this year when the Air Pollution Index reached record levels. CLEAR THE AIR is one of the few groups representing the public interest on air pollution. Many members of the public are unaware that such discussions are even taking place in LegCo. Given that many elected members included action on air pollution in their election manifestos we hope that they will not let their voters down by renegeing on their pre-election promises.

The levels of air pollution in Hong Kong are health, indeed life threatening. The number of hospitalisation days for respiratory cases has increased by 23% since 1996, a portion of which are undoubtedly attributable to air pollution. Impacts on the public range from absenteeism from school and work, to chronic, acute and life-threatening hospital episodes. Individuals with existing respiratory problems are the worst hit. One in 10 children in Hong Kong are asthmatic. Protection of public health should be a priority for Legislators.

Emitting black smoke is a crime. However, several hundred vehicles a day are caught emitting black smoke. The existing fine is clearly not a deterrent and many drivers choose to risk getting caught rather than having their vehicles properly maintained. The only way to force them to maintain their engines better is to increase the fine. This will also provide an incentive for owners to avoid the use of illegal diesel and to retrofit their vehicles with particulate traps which will help reduce pollution further.

We hope members will stand firm on this issue and place the wider public interest first by voting for the implementation of the increased smoky vehicle fine on 1 December 2000.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Spaxman
Chairman