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LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

Meeting on 25 February 2002

**Updated background brief on
promoting reduction and recovery of domestic waste and
creation of new job opportunities in the recycling industry**

Background

To develop a range of new initiatives that would work together to bring about a major reduction in the volume of waste requiring disposal, the Administration commissioned the Waste Reduction Study in 1994. The recommendations of the study which were set out in the form of a Draft Waste Reduction Plan were published for public consultation in mid-1997. On the basis of the public response to the draft plan, policy developments and technological renovation, the Administration issued the Waste Reduction Framework Plan (WRFP) in 1998. The objectives of the 10-year WRFP were to extend the useful life of existing landfills; reduce the land required for new landfills in future; reduce the annual waste management costs; save resources by encouraging the use of less raw materials; produce electricity for local consumption through waste-to-energy incineration; create more job and trade opportunities through encouraging expansion of the recycling industry; reduce the environmental impacts of waste management by cutting the vehicles transporting waste through Hong Kong; reduce the production of greenhouse gases and leachate at landfills; and enhance public awareness of environmental protection.

Waste management

2. Between April 1989 and March 2000, more than \$10.2 billion has been invested in new waste management facilities. These comprise three new sanitary landfills with leachate and gas collection; seven refuse transfer stations and refuse transfer facilities for the outlying islands; a chemical waste treatment centre; and a livestock waste composting plant. On the other hand, the amount of solid waste has been raising as a result of the continuous growth in population and economic activities. In 1999, the total amount of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) generated was 5.2 million tonnes, representing a 45% increase over 1989. The total amount of Construction

and Demolition (C&D) materials generated was 13.5 million tonnes, representing a 100% increase over 1989. Over the same period, the MSW recovery rate varied from 33% in 1989 to 35% in 1999. The rate of re-use of C&D materials increased from 70% in 1989 to 79% in 1999.

3. As the quantities of MSW and C&D materials are expected to rise over the next decade, there is an urgent need for improvements in waste reduction and recycling. At the meeting on 5 June 2001, the Panel was briefed on the measures to tackle the problem related to the management of C&D materials between mid-2002 and end-2005. These measures included -

- (a) avoiding and minimizing C&D materials at source through better planning, design and construction management to reduce the overall volume of C&D materials;
- (b) sorting C&D materials to prevent materials that could be reused or recycled from going to landfills;
- (c) reusing inert C&D materials in reclamation projects and earth filling works;
- (d) recycling hard inert C&D materials as aggregates for concrete production or as granular materials for road sub-base and drainage bedding layers;
- (e) establishing temporary fill banks to tie over temporary mismatch between the generation of C&D materials and the availability of reclamation works; and
- (f) introducing Landfill Charging to provide economic incentive for waste producers to reduce C&D wastes and to reuse/recycle inert materials.

4. While welcoming the measures that had been taken to manage C&D materials, members urged for the early implementation of other measures, particularly the introduction of landfill charges. According to the Administration, discussion on a proposed scheme with the concerned sectors, including the construction industry, the property management industry and the waste haulers associations had been underway. Members would be informed of the progress of in due course. In addition, a study on the long-term arrangements to accommodate inert C&D materials in the next three decades had been started and was expected to be completed in mid-2002. The Administration would continue to monitor the situation closely and explore alternatives in managing C&D materials in the light of developments of the planned reclamation works and the outcome of the study.

Creating employment opportunities by providing support for the waste recovery and recycling industries

5. To gauge public views on WRF, representatives from the recycling industry were invited to attend the Panel meeting on 8 December 1998. It was noted that the trades were very supportive of WRF, but they considered that the Administration should provide assistance to the trades which were facing a gloomy future as a result of high operating costs, particularly in respect of land cost. The closure of the Concordia Paper Company was a typical example. To this end, they urged that measures which included longer-term land at a reduced premium as well as free or low-interest loans should be in place to assist the trades to overcome their operating difficulties.

6. At the Council meeting on 19 January 2000, Mr CHAN Kwok-keung moved a motion urging the Government to adopt recovery, recycling and re-use as its major strategy for waste reduction, so as to reduce the environmental pollution caused by wastes and, at the same time to create more employment opportunities for the working population. Members considered that the Administration should -

- (a) implement the “polluter pays” principle and step up publicity and education on waste separation and recovery to enhance public awareness of waste recycling and re-use;
- (b) provide appropriate facilities for the convenient separation and recovery of wastes by the public and collectors of recyclable wastes;
- (c) establish an industrial estate for the environmental industries and provide land and supporting infrastructure in order to reduce the operating costs of the waste recovery and recycling industries; and
- (d) formulate positive policies and measures, including a policy that gave priority to the procurement of green products in order to increase the demands for these products as well as introducing commercial eco-labels that were suitable for Hong Kong to promote environmentally responsible purchasing among the public and exploiting the local green markets so as to attract more investors to join the waste recovery and recycling industries.

It was hoped that the Government, through supporting labour-intensive industries such as the waste recovery and recycling industries could create more administrative, transport and clerical jobs for the purpose of absorbing grass-root workers. The motion as amended by Hon LAW Chi-kwong was unanimously passed by all Members present at the meeting.

Latest development

7. At the joint meeting with the Manpower Panel on 27 September 2001, members were briefed on the following Government's new initiatives to further promote prevention and recovery of domestic waste in Hong Kong -

- (a) setting up a 20-hectare Recovery Park at Tuen Mun Area 38 by early 2004;
- (b) subject to the approval of the Finance Committee, an injection of \$100 million into the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) largely for district organizations, green groups, voluntary agencies to carry out waste reduction work and activities;
- (c) enhancing collection of separated waste and adding 8 000 newly designated separation bins in strategic locations, including public venues, schools and housing estates;
- (d) introduction of a helpline on waste separation and recycling;
- (e) enhancing public education and community work through various publicity measures, including new Announcement of Public Interest, road shows, a special theme van and other publicity materials;
- (f) Government setting examples on waste reduction; and
- (g) reinforcing producer responsibility scheme.

8. While welcoming the new initiatives, members opined that the Administration was overly conservative in setting the waste reduction targets which should aim at zero waste. They also considered that there should be greater transparency in the allocation process of ECF to ensure impartiality. On supporting the recycling industry, members held the view that consideration should be given to providing financial assistance, which could be derived from savings achieved as a result of reduction of waste to be disposed of at landfills, to the recycling industry. Apart from facilitating the collection, separation and re-manufacturing of waste, efforts should be made to encourage the procurement of the final recycled products. The Government should take the lead in the use of recycled products. On creation of employment, members suggested that instead of providing fund for disposal at landfills, consideration should be given to using the fund to provide a one-line service which included collection, transportation and recycling of waste. This would not only be environmentally friendly but would create a lot of job opportunities as waste recycling was a labour-intensive industry.

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