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**Panel on Environmental Affairs**

**Meeting on 28 February 2005**

**Background brief on management of municipal solid waste in Hong Kong**

**Introduction**

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 rising as a result of the continuous growth in population and economic activities. In 1999, the total amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) (which comprises domestic, commercial and industrial waste) generated was 5.2 million tonnes, representing a 45% increase over 1989. The amount of construction and demolition (C&D) materials (which comprise soft inert materials, hard inert materials and non-inert waste) generated was 13.5 million tonnes, representing a 100% increase over 1989.

**Strategies on waste management**

2. 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 and consulted the public on recommendations of the Study in mid-1997. On the basis of the public response, as well as taking into account latest policy developments and technological renovation, the Administration issued the Waste Reduction Framework Plan (WRFP) in 1998. The objectives of the 10-year WRFP were as follows:

- to extend the useful life of existing landfills;
- to reduce the land required for new landfills in future;
- to reduce the annual waste management costs;
- to save resources by encouraging the use of less raw materials;

- to produce electricity for local consumption through waste-to-energy incineration;
- to create more job and trade opportunities through encouraging expansion of the recycling industry;
- to reduce the environmental impacts of waste management by cutting the vehicles transporting waste through Hong Kong;
- to reduce the production of greenhouse gases and leachate at landfills; and
- to enhance public awareness of environmental protection.

### **Municipal waste**

3. The overall volume of waste has been increasing at an annual rate of 3.5%. For domestic waste alone, the average increase is 4% which is significantly higher than the average population growth of 0.9%. To better manage and contain the increasingly serious problem on MSW, the following measures have been adopted -

- *Strengthening support for waste separation and recovery*

Various waste recovery systems, including placement of waste separation bins at public venues and public/private housing estates to facilitate public participation in waste separation and a 12-month pilot project on wet/dry waste sorting, are being tested out to identify the modes that are most cost-effective and will best suit local needs.

- *Making available land for waste recovery operations*

20 hectares of permanent land in Tuen Mun Area 38 have been set aside for setting up a Recovery Park. Land throughout the territory will also be provided on short-term tenancies for exclusive use by the recycling industry. So far, 27 sites with a total area of about five hectares have been leased to recyclers. Another three short-term tenancy sites in Yau Tong, Fanling and Tseung Kwan O will also be made available to recyclers.

- *Enhancing publicity and education*

Publicity and public education programmes, including exhibitions, seminars, visits by a theme van on waste problems and solutions to shopping centres, schools and housing developments etc., have been organized to promote waste prevention and recovery. Workshops for teachers to enhance their knowledge and teaching skills in waste issues have also been organized by the Environmental Protection Department

(EPD). A hotline service which provides information and advice on waste reduction and separation is also put in place.

- *Government to take a leading role*

All government bureaux and departments are urged to reduce photocopying paper consumption by 10% by 2006-07 i.e. an annual reduction of 2.5%, using 2002-03 as the base year. The recycled content required in the specification of recycled photocopying paper has also been revised from 50% to 80%. Also, the use of retreaded tyres has been extended to all government medium and heavy vehicles. Where practicable, departments involved in greening work are encouraged to use compost made from organic waste. The Government Logistics Department has also been updating product specifications and tender assessment criteria taking into account environmental considerations where practicable.

- *Product Responsibility Schemes*

A pilot mobile phone battery recycling programme was launched in April 2002. Based on the experience from this pilot scheme, EDP has initiated discussion with the trade with a view to expanding the recycling programme to cover other types of rechargeable batteries consumed in Hong Kong. To further promote waste tyre recycling, the Administration is exploring the feasibility of introducing a product responsibility scheme (PRS) to provide incentives for stakeholders to reuse/recycle waste tyres. It also plans to conduct another regulatory impact assessment study on the implementation of PRS for electrical and electronic equipment and for beverage containers in the second half of 2004.

- *Closer cooperation with the business sector*

Business sector, particularly management companies, restaurants and hotels, are encouraged to take a more active role in waste prevention. Examples include leftover food donation programme, furniture and plastic bottles and textile recycling programmes specially designed for hotels, plastic bag recovery programmes involving supermarket chains and mooncake containers recovery trial involving property management companies and restaurants.

- *Closer cooperation with District Councils*

Collaboration with District Councils in carrying out various types of district-based waste prevention and recovery will continue as they are in a better position to assess the needs of the districts, and at the same time can mobilize the support of local residence.

4. As a result of the above measures, the quantity of MSW requiring disposal was maintained at 3.4 million tonnes each year from 2000 to 2003, comparing favourably with the 3.5% annual growth rate in the years before 2000. The overall MSW recovery rate rose from 34% to 36% in 2002 and to about 41% in 2003. The domestic waste recovery rate rose from 8% to 13% in 2002.

### **Panel's views on management of municipal waste**

5. While welcoming the measures taken to manage MSW, some members of the Panel on Environmental Affairs (EA Panel) held the view that the Administration should put in place more vigorous initiatives, such as introduction of a charging scheme for MSW to provide incentive for sorting and recycling. They also expressed concern on the slow progress in the review of the waste management policy. According to the Administration, it had been consulting the trades and the stakeholders on various initiatives to manage waste. For instance, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) had commenced a regulatory impact assessment study in October 2003 to assess the costs and benefits of different options to facilitate recycling of waste tyres as well as their impacts on stakeholders. Possible options included the introduction of a levy on new tyres, a disposal charge on waste tyres and a levy on the vehicle licence fee. The study was expected to complete in mid-2004 after which EPD would consult the industry and stakeholders on the recommended option. On the proposed introduction of a charging scheme on the disposal of MSW, the Administration's explanation was that any such proposals would need to be carefully assessed and the public would be duly consulted.

### **Latest position**

#### Strengthening support for waste separation and recovery

6. The Wet/dry Waste Separation Pilot Programme was carried out in four housing estates from April 2003 to July 2004. Participating households separated wastes into wet and dry wastes which were then gathered at Refuse Collection Points of the estates by cleansing workers. Contractors of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department then delivered the wastes to Island East Refuse Transfer Station for sorting. The sorted dry wastes were sold to recyclers. Revenue generated was used to offset the sorting cost. According to the Administration, the scheme was effective in improving domestic waste recovery rate, but the cost of this recovery method was too high. With the experience gained in the Wet/dry Waste Separation Pilot Programme, a 12-month pilot programme on Source Separation of Waste was launched in August 2004 in 13 housing estates in the Eastern District covering about 37 000 households and a population of about 120 000.

Product Responsibility Schemes

7. The regulatory impact assessment study to identify possible options of PRS for waste tyres and their impact on the trade and stakeholders is near completion. The Administration aims to commence public consultation in the second quarter of 2005 and to implement the PRS on waste tyres by late 2006.

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