



The views of the Association of Engineering Professionals in Society (AES) on “Environmental Levy on Plastic Shopping Bags” presented at the Meeting of the Panel on Environmental Affairs on 16 July 2007

1. In view of the imminent and serious waste problem and the increasingly indiscriminate use of plastic shopping bags in Hong Kong, the Association is in full support of the Government’s recommendation to implement the “Polluter pays principle” to tackle the waste problem and the belated Government’s proposal to introduce an environmental levy on plastic shopping bags.
2. This producer responsibility scheme, which involves an environmental levy on plastic shopping bags to be paid directly by customers and allows no giving-out of free plastic shopping bags by the retailer, would be a very effective economic deterrent to immediately discourage the indiscriminate use of plastic shopping bags. In parallel with suitably coordinated education campaign on waste reduction and eco-responsibility, the levy proposal will help to change public’s behaviour to use fewer plastic shopping bags and to turn to reusable shopping bags.
3. The proposed levy level of 50 cents for each plastic shopping bag is a starting point, and would create a deterring effect. Depending on the implementation result of the Scheme, we may consider raising the levy level to 1 dollar, or introducing a sliding charge scheme in respect of the number, the weight and the size of plastic shopping bags so as to enhance the effectiveness of the Scheme.
4. All retail outlets in Hong Kong should be ultimately included in the Scheme to achieve a wide and an encompassing benefit on environmental protection. Whilst we have no objection to the Government’s phased approach by initially covering chain or large supermarkets, convenience stores and personal health and beauty stores, this pilot trial scheme should be extended to cover all retail outlets as soon as possible, once the administration problems are resolved.
5. We are much concerned with the key objective to reduce the indiscriminate use of shopping bags of all sorts and to switch to reusable bags. In this connection, we are open to the types of bags to be included in this Scheme, and therefore we do not care whether these bags are plastic or non-plastic; degradable or non-degradable; and carrying dry products or wet products. Our view is that the Scheme should be expanded to cover all types of bags.
6. It is estimated that the environmental levy will generate up to an amount of \$200 million each year. Rather than including the collected levy as Government revenue, we propose that the collected levy is to be deposited into a separate fund and the money be spent on environmental protection initiatives.
7. As the Scheme moves forward, we should monitor the public’s behaviour to see if people switch to using more of other types of bags, such as paper bags, fabric bags, etc. to a large extent as to defeat the original intention of the Scheme to reduce the use of bags or solid waste. Moreover, some kinds of bags may be even more environmentally unfriendly. For example, dirty fabric bags may also be disposed without being reused. Paper bags and fabric bags take much more energy for their production. In this connection, life cycle analyses of the various alternatives can be carried out to assess their environmental impacts.

ASSOCIATION OF ENGINEERING PROFESSIONALS IN SOCIETY
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