

Bills Committee on the Product Eco-responsibility Bill

Reuse and Recycling of Plastic Shopping Bags

This paper provides supplementary information on the reuse and recycling of plastic shopping bags.

Overall Policy and Waste Situation

2. Our policy on the management of plastic shopping bag waste places priority on reducing the use of plastic shopping bags at source, to be followed by the promotion of their reuse and recycling as far as possible. Despite the sustained publicity and educational efforts since the launch of the “Bring Your Own Bag” campaign in 1993, the indiscriminate use of plastic shopping bags remains a serious environmental problem, whereby the number of plastic shopping bags disposed of at landfills remains in the order of *billions*. To address this problem effectively, we have introduced the Product Eco-responsibility Bill, with the proposed environmental levy on plastic shopping bags in prescribed retail outlets as the first scheme to curb the indiscriminate use of plastic shopping bags.

3. In addition, to facilitate collection and recycling of recyclables including plastic waste, we plan to amend the Building (Refuse Storage and Material Recovery Chambers and Refuse Chutes) Regulation (Cap.123H) to mandate the provision of refuse storage and material recovery room on every floor of new domestic buildings and the domestic part of composite buildings. Our target is to introduce the necessary amendment into the Legislative Council within this legislative session with a view to implementation towards the end of this year.

4. While separate statistics on the recovery of plastic shopping bags is not available, we observe that over 640,000 tonnes of plastic waste were recovered and recycled in 2006, representing a recovery rate of 51%. We also observe a mild decrease in the disposal of plastic bags over the years, from 388,000 tonnes in 2002 to 326,000 tonnes in 2006. This has been achieved through the provision of the necessary infrastructure together with intensive publicity and education campaigns.

Promotional Measures to Facilitate Reuse and Recycling

5. To facilitate the recovery of plastic shopping bags, the Environmental

Protection Department (EPD) launched a “Plastic Bag (Domestic) Recovery Trial” in as early as 2002. Collection bins were placed at 36 housing estates and 24 outlets of a major supermarket chain to facilitate the recovery of plastic shopping bags. About one tonne of plastic shopping bags were collected every month during the trial period.

6. In the light of the success of the trial scheme, the three-coloured recycling bin programme was expanded in 2005 to include the collection of *all* plastic materials, including plastic shopping bags, through the “brown” recycling bins. As at end-2007, some 28,000 three-coloured recycling bins were placed throughout the territory, and between 2002 and 2007, more than 720 tonnes of plastic waste were collected through the three-coloured recycling bin programme.

7. To further facilitate the recovery of plastic shopping bags and other recyclables, the EPD has rolled out the “Source Separation of Domestic Waste” programme territory-wide since January 2005. Plastic materials, including plastic shopping bags, are separately collected under the programme. As at end 2007, more than 760 housing estates joined the programme, covering a population of about three million. According to the information provided by some 280 participating estates that report their waste recovery performance to EPD regularly, the amount of plastic materials recovered has increased by four folds and reached some 3,000 tonnes since their participation in the programme.

8. Publicity campaign is launched to encourage the adoption of green and environmental friendly lifestyle. In the “I Love Hong Kong, I Love Green” campaign, reduction, reuse and recycling of plastic shopping bags is a key component. The campaign includes -

- (a) a series of television (TV) and radio announcements of public interests (API’s) to arouse public awareness of the environmental problems and encourage early actions, including bringing your own bags and separating waste for recycling;
- (b) a dedicated “Waste Reduction” website to give the public a one-stop source of information about waste reduction, reuse and recycling, including tips to reduce and reuse plastic shopping bags and information on plastic recycling; and
- (c) a computer game to educate the public on our waste problem and the possible solutions, including the reduction, reuse and recycling of plastic shopping bags.

9. Aside from the overall environmental campaign, the EPD conducts targeted public education programmes on waste, particularly during festive seasons when consumption and waste generation are usually at a higher level. For example, the EPD has been organizing an annual “Lunar Year-End Recycling Campaign” to promote waste recovery and recycling during the Chinese New Year. Housing estates are encouraged to strengthen their waste recovery activities for their residents to recover reusable and recyclable materials, including plastic shopping bags. Publicity materials, such as posters and leaflets, are also provided to housing estates to promote the Campaign.

10. In addition, the EPD produces TV and radio API’s, which focus specifically on plastic bag reduction and waste separation for recycling. The EPD also makes use of advertisement at public transport, posters at shopping malls and retail outlets, as well as direct promotion at variety shows to further spread the message of the reduction, reuse and recycling of plastic shopping bags.

11. Major retailers and green groups are key partners of the EPD in promoting the reduction, reuse and recycling of plastic shopping bags. In 2006, major retailers, including the three largest supermarket chains, entered into a “Voluntary Agreement on Plastic Bag Reduction” with the EPD and pledged to reduce 120 million plastic shopping bags in a year. In parallel, major green groups launched a “No Plastic Bag Day” campaign to drum up public momentum. Through these initiatives, participating retailers achieved a reduction of 150 million plastic shopping bags in a year’s time, over-achieving their reduction target, and pledged to conduct monthly or weekly “No Plastic Bag Day” on a self-sustaining basis.

12. The Environment and Conservation Fund is another major source of support for promoting awareness on our waste problem. In the past six years, the Fund allocated more than \$23 million to public education programme and community projects on waste recovery and recycling. The Fund has further earmarked \$10 million to support a public education programme on the “Policy Framework for the Management of Municipal Solid Waste (2005-2014)”, where waste recovery and recycling is a major focus.

Overseas Practice

13. The practice overseas is largely similar to that of Hong Kong, with focuses on avoidance and reduction at source, the provision of recycling facilities at convenient locations and public education to encourage participation.

Some examples are given below:

(a) Australia

The Australian Environment Protection and Heritage Council and the Australian Retailers' Association entered into a voluntary agreement in 2003, which requires retailers to implement a "Code of Practice for the Management of Plastic Shopping Bags". The Code sets reduction targets for retailers and requires retailers to provide recycling bins for the return of clean plastic shopping bags.

(b) California

California enacted the Assembly Bill No. 2449 in 2006 to encourage the recovery of plastic shopping bags. The Bill requires the operator of a retail store with a retail area of over 10,000 sq. feet to establish an in-store recycling program that allows customers to return clean plastic shopping bags. Collection bins shall be easily accessible to customers and clearly marked for the collection of plastic shopping bags.

(c) Ireland

In addition to an environmental levy on plastic shopping bags, Ireland also introduced a new Waste Management (Packaging) Regulations 2007 to implement the "EC Directive 2004/12/EC" on packaging and packaging waste. The Regulations will require packaging waste producers (including retailers that offer plastic shopping bags to their customers) to provide facilities for separate collection of packaging and packaging waste for recycling. The Regulations shall come into operation in March 2008.

(d) Taiwan

In addition to the "Restricted Use Policy on Plastic Shopping Bags", the Taiwan Environmental Protection Administration launched a trial scheme in May 2006 to encourage the recycling of plastic shopping bags in 14 counties and municipalities. Clean plastic shopping bags were separately sorted and collected through the existing recyclables collection system. It was reported that over 2,000 tonnes of used plastic shopping bags were collected between May and December 2006. In light of the initial success, the trial scheme was expanded to 25 counties and municipalities in April 2007.

(e) Singapore

A "National Recycling Programme" was launched in April 2001, under which licensed public waste collectors would collect recyclables from households for recycling. Recycling bins are also placed at strategic

locations of housing estates to facilitate recovery and recycling. Clean plastic shopping bags are one of the recyclables under the Programme.

Way Forward

14. We need to sustain our efforts in addressing the environmental problems associated with plastic shopping bags. The proposed environmental levy on plastic shopping bags under the Product Eco-responsibility Bill will help reduce the indiscriminate use of plastic shopping bags at the retail level, and our sustained efforts in promoting the reuse and recycling of plastic shopping bags will further reduce the disposal of plastic shopping bags. To further enhance public awareness on these issues, we will launch a new series of TV and radio API's shortly to promote plastic shopping bag reduction, reuse and recycling, while another radio API focusing on the three-coloured recycling bins programme will be broadcasted soon. We are also in discussion with green groups to launch new public education campaigns which focus on the reuse and recycling of plastic shopping bags.

15. We would explore with major retailers on how best to promote the recovery of plastic shopping bags, including the feasibility of providing collection bins at their retail shops to facilitate the public to recycle plastic shopping bags. As for the suggestions to use incentives to encourage plastic shopping bag recycling, we want to stress that consumers' eco-responsibility lies in the reduction of plastic shopping bag usage as the top priority followed by the reuse of plastic shopping bags as far as possible. Recycling used or surplus plastic shopping bags depends on the mechanism and logistics for collection and other market conditions, and the Administration will liaise with the recycling industry to explore whether (and if yes, what kind of) incentives will be effective.

Environmental Protection Department
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