



香港工程師學會

THE HONG KONG INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS

香港銅鑼灣地利佐治街一號金百利樓
8/F Island Beverley, No 1 Great George St, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong
電話 Tel +852 2895 4448 傳真 Fax +852 2577 7781
hkic-sec@hkic.org.hk www.hkie.org.hk

CB(1) 966/08-09(17)

會長 黃耀新工程師
President Ir Peter Y WONG
BSc LLB LLM FHKIE R,P,E.
CEng FIET FCIBSE
president@hkic.org.hk
pyswong@member.hkie.org.hk

By mail and by fax at 2869 6794

3 March 2009

Clerk to Subcommittee
Subcommittee on Product Eco-responsibility
(Plastic Shopping Bags) Regulation
Legislative Council Secretariat
3rd Floor, Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road, Central
Hong Kong

(Attn: Mrs Mary TANG)

Dear Mrs Tang,

Views on Product Eco-responsibility (Plastic Shopping Bags) Regulation

Thank you for your email of 20 February 2009 inviting the Institution to put forth our views on the Product Eco-responsibility (Plastic Shopping Bags) Regulation (the Regulation) made under section 29 of the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance (Cap. 603).

The HKIE supports the principle that is made to reduce abuse and misuse of resources and avoidable pollution of any kind. Such constructive efforts include the reduction of plastic bags. The implementation of such, of which HKIE firmly believes, must be equitable even if the target of "Eco-responsibility" is selectively chosen for enforcement as well as striving for a best cost and effect balance. The Regulation in its present format however does not meet HKIE expectation in this regard. We attach again a copy of our views and arguments submitted to the Panel on Environmental Affairs dated 9 July 2007 for ease of reference.

The percentage of solid waste of plastic bags in comparison to others is already small, let alone the limited coverage of the Regulation on types of usage and of selective outlets. The HKIE notes various concessions had been made in the interim to accommodate "necessary" deployments. These, in HKIE opinions, were just evidences of the inherent defect of the Regulation.

The HKIE further examined whether the true virtue of the Regulation actually lies in bringing a clear and undisputed message to the public in avoiding abusive use of plastic bags. Again the HKIE is not convinced in this regard since there are usages of more tons of plastic bags and plastic sheets in other industries that also warrant a close scrutiny, say construction and food, than retailing. The Regulation would not stop "selling goods" be wrapped in plastic sheet before putting into paper ones, and a stick of candy packed inside a large plastic bag sold at the check out counter of a store.

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3 March 2009
Mrs Mary TANG

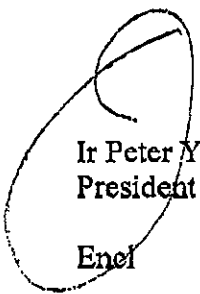
Hong Kong would be better served if we can adopt a more analytical approach in drafting regulations. Engineers excel in putting emphasis on fundamentals such as waste data, statistics, mass balance, logistics, executive feasibility, consistency, and likely ramifications. The proposed Regulation does not meet our criteria to be effective. Driving environmental campaigns based solely on political desires, without backing it up with a sound and pragmatic approach in overall execution risks wasting time and resources without achieving the objectives.

In our opinion, the Administration has to revisit the worthiness of the Regulation in its limited scope and be prepared to give due consideration on a more embracing control on plastic products as a whole.

We emphasise on the importance of delivering a proper message to the public. We believe that through mass education, consumer behaviour will gradually change. Where needed the pace could be fast-tracked by enacting regulations. But the policy behind must be equitable and the enforcement in execution pertinent.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,


Ir Peter Y WONG
President

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9/F Island Beverley, No 1 Great George St, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong
電話 Tel +852 2895 4446 傳真 Fax +852 2577 7791
hkie-sec@hkie.org.hk www.hkie.org.hk

會長 盧偉國博士、工程師 太平紳士

President Ir Dr LO Wai Kwok MH JP

BSc(Eng) MSc(Eng) MBA EngD·CEng

FHKIE FIEE MIMechE R.P.E.

president@hkie.org.hk

Enclosure

By mail and by fax at 2869 6794

9 July 2007

Clerk to Panel
Panel on Environmental Affairs
Legislative Council Secretariat
3rd Floor, Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road, Central
Hong Kong

(Attn: Mrs Mary TANG)

Dear Mrs Tang

LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs – Views on the proposal on an environmental levy on plastic shopping bags

Thank you for your letter of 11 June 2007 inviting the Institution to put forth our views on the proposal on an environmental levy on plastic shopping bags.

Having received expert views from our members, we are pleased to forward our submission to you for consideration of the Panel.

Yours sincerely

Ir Dr LO Wai Kwok MH JP
President

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Enclosure

Legislative Council – Panel on Environmental Affairs

**Summary of views from the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers
on the proposal on an environmental levy on plastic shopping bags**

General

1. The Hong Kong Institution of Engineers (HKIE) refers to the Administration's proposal on an environmental levy on plastic shopping bags and the proposed phased approach of the scheme.
2. The HKIE is supportive of Government's initiative to reduce solid wastes through economic means and actions to stop "abuse" of plastic shopping bags. However, the following should be well considered in the design of this new initiative.

The Proposal

The proposed phased approach

3. We consider that the initial phase of imposing levy on shopping bags from chain or large supermarkets, convenience stores and personal health and beauty stores should be viewed as a pilot trial scheme only. According to the landfill survey of the Environmental Protection Department, these retailers make up less than 4% of our retail outlets. The initial phase of imposing levy on shopping bags from these outlets would not likely achieve a significant benefit for environmental protection. Moreover, the trial duration should not be too long to mislead the public that differential treatment on other plastic bags and kinds of solid wastes are to be given.

The level of the levy

4. We consider it is scientifically incorrect to apply the same environmental levy of 50 cents per bag irrespective of their sizes and weights.
5. We suggest that the levy be collected directly through plastic bag suppliers to the covered outlets based on the weight of plastic bags provided. The proposal to require "relevant retailers" to assist in the levy collection appears to give these retailers double discrimination in that they are singled out from the others to pay for the levy and that they have to provide the necessary additional administration expenses for levy collection. Our suggestion will make the levy more scientifically sound and administratively less onerous to these retailers. The retailers, who have already paid the suppliers the levy, have incentive to recover the cost from their customers. These outlets should also not be required to police if customers have snatched plastic bags by themselves for use out of convenience.

Other recommendations

6. We advise against improper message and education delivered to the public on the so-called “environmentally friendly” shopping bags which may give rise to possible environmental problems. The curb on plastic bag use may not necessarily induce reduction in solid wastes if people switched to use paper bags. Fabric bags, once become dirty may also be disposed without being reused hence may also constitute to solid wastes. Paper bags and fabric bags take much more energy for their production, therefore disposal of paper or other kinds of bags (such as used travel bags) may be more environmental unfriendly than that of plastic bags.

7. We recommend that proper message should be delivered to the public in future education programmes and Government should promote the use of reusable “environmentally friendly” plastic bags which are exempted from the environmental levy under the current proposal. The proposal by some people to exempt degradable plastic shopping bags from the environmental levy should not be ignored and merit further considerations, although we agree that the so claimed “degradable plastic bag” must be fully supplemented by scientific evidence. From the engineering and scientific point of view, no materials including plastics should be labeled as good or bad. The said key objective of the present Government proposal to reduce the indiscriminate use of plastic shopping bags is thus difficult to comprehend. The community can no longer afford to kill innovations to enable any commodities to be more environmental friendly. Plastic bags should not be banned simply because they are made of plastics.

8. We urge Government to provide incentive in the forms of reward and subsidy to promote attractive and environmentally green shopping bag for repeated use.