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8 January 2001

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Dear Mrs Yu,

LegCo Panel on Manpower
List of follow-up actions

At the June meeting of the Panel on Manpower, Members requested information about the cost and environmental impact of landfills, incinerators and recycling facilities. Our response is set out below.

Cost

Currently, there are three landfills in Hong Kong. They are designed, constructed and operated to the highest possible environmental standards. Using these landfills as the basis for calculation, the average cost (capital and operation) is about \$125 per tonne of waste. Certainly, the figure could be different if the landfills are built or operated under different conditions.

As for incineration or other bulk waste treatment processes, the cost would vary with the design, capacity and the technology used, but would most likely be higher than for landfilling. However, incineration is capable of reducing the volume of waste by 80 - 90%. This would help save landfill space, which in turn would save landfill cost. In addition, the possibility of recovering energy through the incineration process may also generate revenue to offset part of the cost. Given the many variables involved and the absence of recent practical experience with incineration of municipal solid waste in Hong Kong to guide us, we are not in a position to provide reasonably reliable cost figures at the present moment.

Similarly, we are not able to provide reliable figures for recycling facilities in general, since the cost of recycling varies with the technologies used, the materials processed, as well as the market situation of both the materials and the recycled products.

Environmental Impacts

It is neither possible nor appropriate to draw a direct comparison between the environmental impacts of different waste management methods. The different nature of the methods produce different types of emissions and risks to the environment and human populations. Those risks have to be managed by different precautionary and mitigation measures.

Furthermore, it is not the case that there is one method that can address every requirement of waste management. Neither recycling facilities, nor landfills nor incinerators by themselves are an adequate solution to waste management. A combination of treatment methods, backed by appropriate legislation and financial arrangements, is needed to reduce and manage waste in a safe manner.

Our policy is to ensure that any waste facilities built in Hong Kong are planned, designed, built and operated to meet the most stringent standards for the specific purpose and working conditions. Hence, prior to the development of any facility, all potential environmental impacts will be assessed and addressed thoroughly. Appropriate measures will be put in place to ensure that it will not adversely affect people or the natural environment.

I hope the above have addressed Members' concern. Should there be further queries, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

(Ms Annie Choi)
for Secretary for the Environment and Food