

21 October 2013

Dear Legislators

Further reduction on the use of shopping bags is needed

There is a Chinese saying - for any consequences there must be a reason. It is quite true to reflect the severe waste crisis Hong Kong is facing today.

The consequence is the faster than estimated filling up of the limited space (landfills) that is catered to keep our waste generated by all types of activities of our city. Apparently the reason is our wasteful attitude from large furniture to even thin shopping bags!

Let alone other difficult-to-handle waste such as electronic waste or waste from trade shows and exhibitions, as it is hard for individuals to reduce or to reuse and recycle. It requires the relevant industries to develop eco-friendly business practices and have consensus among them to act accordingly, if legislation is not yet in place.

But there is something rather easy for individuals to act to reduce – the shopping bags. The first phase of the shopping bag levy has achieved significant reduction (over 90 percent), now the government has put forward to LegCo the draft legislation for the second phase, which will cover all retailers. We need legislators to support the bill.

The proposed bill aims to further reduce the excessive use of shopping bags by covering all shops instead of a limited type of shops which I believe is a practical means to help the public to establish a **Waste Avoidance** attitude. Waste avoidance is at the top of the waste management hierarchy, so if we can avoid using many shopping bags, we don't even need to consider the other lower level means such as to recycle or landfill them.

To be practical and make it easy for all retail outlets especially those small shops, the government proposes to let all shops keep the levy they collect from customers. Hong Kong people are very smart although they might not be eco-friendly. So most will take along our own shopping bags or trolleys to avoid paying even as little as 50 cents a bag to shops when the new legislation is in place.



To avoid potential legal challenges by some of the retailers, I can understand and support the government in extending the current legislation to cover all shops and the big chain stores should be treated equally. They too would not need to hand the collected levy to the government under the new legislation. However, I am sure the government and the social sector will keep encouraging retailers especially the large chain stores to donate the collected levy to support many worthy social causes including environmental education on waste reduction.

The proposed legislation is clearly not a means for the government to collect more taxes from the public as they have proposed retailers to keep the levy, which has a high chance to be redistributed to support many NGOs. However, if our legislators insist that all retailers need to hand the levy to the government, such money will then end up in the general income pool and our government cannot act like the private sector to donate money to worthy causes run by various NGOs in our society. I am sure our legislators don't want the government to collect more taxes in any way from the public.

By extending the current bag levy legislation, it will make a more fair market for all retailers than currently with only part of the retailers being covered by that legislation introduced in July 2009.

After all, our society should move forward with better environmental legislation and policies that will help establish green habits and attitudes for all of us who should manage the planet Earth sustainably for our future generations.

Yours sincerely

Edwin Lau Che-feng, MH
Director-general affairs
Friends of the Earth (HK)

香港地球之友
Friends of the Earth (HK)

香港北角屈臣道 2 號海景大廈 A 座 13 樓 1301-1302 室
Room 1301-1302, 13/F, Block A, Sea View Estate, 2 Watson Road, Hong Kong
電話 phone: (852) 2528-5588
傳真 fax: (852) 2529-2777
網址 website: <http://www.foe.org.hk>