

Please Reject Mass Burn Incineration, and Advocate Smarter Ways of Minimising Waste to Landfills

Written Submission to the Panel on Environmental Affairs of the Legislative Council, on "Environmental infrastructure projects"

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Woeful Situation

Hong Kong indeed finds itself in a woeful situation, 13 years into the 21st century, with very high waste disposed of per capita, and waste treatment policies resulting in extremely high pressures on landfills.

Much can be done to drastically reduce waste to landfills.

Unreliable Figures?

Part of the pressure on landfills results from much of the domestic waste being, we're told, non-recyclable.

Yet what is the source regarding our supposedly high percentage of waste that is recycled? Seems far too optimistic; waste sorting is rudimentary, and very badly supported. With real effort, far more could be recycled.

- panel members who have tried putting plastic bottles into bins for them will have found that they are maafan to use, even when you find one. Plus, not encouraging when there are stories of all waste simply being collected and thrown together [presumably headed for landfills].

Weak Policies; Advocate Zero Waste

Despite strategy reports over the years, we have feeble policies regarding waste. Even charges on plastic bags seemed a huge step for Hong Kong.

How pathetic! We should do far more.

Look at places working towards zero waste, see measures they have introduced, follow that has worked. For instance, San Francisco, Taiwan, places in Italy and other parts of Europe – the list is impressive, and growing.

The Environmental Protection Department seems, to me, far too prone to focusing on what is supposedly not working, like saying San Francisco has not yet achieved zero waste. What a bad attitude!

We Need Smarter Waste Charging, and Deposits

If government is too timid to introduce waste charging as some places have it - such as charging for plastic bags used, too bad.

Are there other options? Far more use of charges for plastic bags? If not charged at the till, a tax on plastic bags, for instance, before they go to shops.

Also, deposits seem good idea to me. Small amounts to encourage people to bring waste items to collection centres. Especially plastic bottles: even 20cents on a bottle would encourage people to collect and bring to centres, reducing littering and waste to landfills, but not solving problem of using bottles once and throwing away.

As to latter: stores could sell cheaper water to people who bring their own bottles.

More ideas must be possible; HK people are not dumb, yet our waste policies are absurd.

Food Waste Should be Government Responsibility

We learn of food waste being a major component of Hong Kong waste.

Yet why is it that treating food waste is not the government's job? After all, government employs businesses to dump waste in landfills, and has billions of dollars available to build incinerators and expand landfills?

Why is food waste treating just given tiny amounts of money for projects run on charitable basis?

Also: did panel members know that food waste projects with money from Environment and Conservation Fund cannot collect from restaurants, as this is supposedly helping restaurants? Absurd! If someone collects unsorted restaurant waste, takes it to landfill, it's okay; but if restaurants sort the waste – will be maafan – and the food waste is then collected for treatment, it is not allowed under ECF terms.

Incineration is Not the Answer

I know people saying don't want landfills expanded see incineration as easy option, especially as Shek Kwu Chau seems far away. But it's bad in many ways, including emissions, toxic ash that needs landfilling. Not modern technology, but glorified bonfires, with only poor monitoring of emissions. Much information covers significant health impacts; it's in Hong Kong's interests to also try to influence nearby China, reduce numbers of incinerators there.

Use Better Technologies

There are better technologies than incineration. Anaerobic digestion for food waste, say; government for some reason has plans for only small and inadequate food waste treatment. Why not more treatment plants, at several places, at or near waste collection hubs?

Plasma arc waste treatment is fast emerging as major process worldwide. Tiny emissions, zero ash; and flexible – can create power in situ, or create jet fuel or shipping fuel.

Could build plasma arc plant[s] at or near landfills – if not Tsuen Kwan O at first. And if not enough “fresh” waste to treat, can mine the landfills: derive energy from suitable material, while recovering valuable metals etc. Then, restore the landscape, which would surely be a boon to nearby residents.

Consider Seeking Removal of Anissa Wong?

Long ago, I interviewed Stuart Reed, who was outgoing director of the Environmental Protection Department. At the time, the EPD was held in high regard as I recall; had achieved some successes, such as legislating versus factory emissions which somewhat cleaned air over north Kowloon, and closing down three waste incinerators as they were major sources of air pollution including 20 percent of Hong Kong's air particulate emissions.

But look at EPD now: does little more than monitoring, coming up with excuses for not taking action like more recycling, and even advocates building gigantic incinerator in prime location for the globally endangered finless porpoise. What a pathetic department! Hopefully not everyone in EPD team is so lacklustre, but does seem there is dire leadership. Anissa Wong might be a decent human being, but it seems she is no environmentalist, nor a dedicated and inspirational leader.