

Council of Public Relations Firms of Hong Kong

Position Paper on the Implementation of the Municipal Solid Waste Charge

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The Council of Public Relations Firms of Hong Kong represents over 35 public relations consultancies in Hong Kong. We work together to ensure high standards of professional competence and ethical practice, and to promote the vital role of effective public relations in the management of organizations. Importantly, we champion corporate responsibility, and play a key role in fostering social-minded business cultures.

Waste is often a direct output of PR and marketing activities. As such, we welcome the implementation of the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Charge. Our hope is that the charge will bring about significant improvements in infrastructure and support for waste minimisation at source.

Increasingly, global corporations have adopted targets to reduce waste in their offices and facilities around the world; some are even working towards zero waste offices. They stop short of achieving these targets in Hong Kong as they struggle to find information and vendors who can help recycle resources. An effective MSW Charge will create a market that helps corporations realise these targets in Hong Kong.

Between now and 2019, multiple gaps must be filled to ensure that the recycling infrastructure and guidelines are in place for the launch of the scheme. In particular, we ask relevant authorities to address three areas of concern to our members and their clients:

1. **Event management:** At mega-events, such as trade fairs, expos, festivals and sports events, it is important that venue providers and event organisers act compliantly, and put in place a user-friendly system for waste separation. This includes the provision of waste and recycling bins at a 1:1 ratio. Waste audits should be conducted at recurrent events for performance benchmarking and monitoring.
2. **Retail waste:** In office buildings and malls, there needs to be clear assignment of responsibilities on who bears the cost of waste management under circumstances that lead to above-average waste output, for example, when retail tenants are required by landlords to move location for marketing purposes, or when F&B outlets are only allowed to serve with disposable cutlery and utensils.
3. **Community service:** Beach clean-up and surplus food collection are amongst the most common activities in corporate social responsibility programmes. In 2016, over 80,000 volunteers took part in the Hong Kong Cleanup campaign and collected 5,567 tonnes of waste from 1,696 km of shorelines, country park trails and city streets.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ecozine. The Hong Kong Cleanup 2016 Report. 2017. [https://issuu.com/ecozine/docs/2016\\_hkc\\_report](https://issuu.com/ecozine/docs/2016_hkc_report)  
Accessed on 24 May 2017.

We hope that the waste generated from this type of CSR programmes can be exempted from the charge.

At the consumer level, wholesale behavioural change will not happen overnight. In the run up to the launch of the scheme, we see a critical need to broaden the reach of public education and build public confidence in the existing recycling system. While society at large recognises the gravity of our waste problem, behavioural change remains limited in scale.

One key reason is that waste separation and the drop-off of recyclable/ reusable items require much more time, planning, knowledge and attentiveness. To persuade people to learn and adopt best practice, public education campaigns need to reach much deeper into communities through NGOs, District Councils and other partners, and create more online and offline touch points for consumers to obtain information about recycling in the most convenient way possible.

Another culprit is cynicism. A significant proportion of the population dismisses waste separation as a futile behaviour. Stories abound telling how entire bags of recyclables are turned in to refuse trucks for the landfill. It is important that public education campaigns dispel myths about recycling and build public confidence in Hong Kong's recycling system.

We call upon all sectors of society to work constructively and collaboratively to enable the implementation of the scheme. We look forward to the day that Hong Kong leaves the rank of the most wasteful cities in the world, and joins the league of role models for best practice in urban waste management.

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