

Submission by Prof. CS Poon

The effective management of municipal solid waste (MSW) in highly urbanized cities like Hong Kong has become a major limiting factor in governing the sustainable development of these metropolises. Hong Kong is now facing a crisis of not having sufficient disposal capacity to handle the city's MSW in the near future as all the three landfills that have been commissioned in the 1990s will be filled up soon.

It has been generally recognized that a sustainable integrated waste management strategy should comprise four key elements: (a) waste avoidance and minimization, (b) waste recovery, reuse and recycling, (c) waste treatment including volume reduction, and finally (d) landfill disposal of residual waste. To achieve these aims, many governments have plans to set out more specifically the strategy for the management of MSW to achieve targets such as: to reduce the amount of MSW generated by a certain percentage per annum, and to increase the recovery rate of MSW to certain percentage by a certain date. Recently, the Hong Kong Government has also set targets on waste reduction and recycling.

Government's data also shows that while Hong Kong population has grown during 2009-2015 by 4.7%, over the same period 13% more MSW was required disposal at landfills. This trend is worrying as it seems that although with increasing environmental awareness and better availability of waste recycling channels, Hong Kong is still producing more waste. This may partly be explained by the higher levels of commercial and tourism activities in Hong Kong.

Incentives must be in place to encourage waste producers to reduce and recycle more waste. Producer Responsibility Schemes (PRSS) and MSW charging are two effective measures that have been practiced in many different places to reduce waste generation. In Hong Kong, it has been gathered through a number of public engagement processes that the public at large is receptive to these incentive schemes due probably to the increasing environmental awareness in the community. Government and the legislature should expedite the policy formulation and legislative processes to implement such incentives.

The proposed quantity based MSW charging scheme is supported as it would provide the essential incentive for waste reduction, in particular for the increasing amount of commercial and industrial wastes in the MSW waste stream. For residential waste, the charge scheme would promote the environmental awareness of domestic waste producers and the charge level imposed would not be a burden for the majority of the population. Suitable assistance scheme should be incorporated for those who may face hardship due to the charge.