



Friends of the Earth's Submission for the Bills Committee to Study the Waste Disposal (Charging for Municipal Solid Waste) (Amendment) Bill

Since the publishing of the *Hong Kong Blueprint for Sustainable Use of Resources 2013-2022*, the city's municipal solid waste (MSW) generation has not fallen but continued on a steady rising trend. While there was a small drop in 2019, the Government is nowhere close to meeting its "40% reduction by 2022" target set in the blueprint. Despite the resources put into the popular Big Waster and overarching outreach campaign, the fruits of labour were not realised without incentives for either individuals or businesses to practice waste reduction.

Friends of the Earth (HK) is supportive of the Waste Disposal (Charging for Municipal Solid Waste) (Amendment) Bill as an important pillar for the sustainable development of a circular economy. We urge legislators to also strengthen the following aspects to ensure the scheme works well:

1. Support the development of the local recycling industry

Without avenues to collect the separated recyclable waste, households will either be needlessly punished financially by the charging scheme or be encouraged to fly-tip to avoid the cost. While the Government is setting up Recycling Stations across the 18 districts, it should ensure the back-end of the system can actually process the recyclable waste. This is particularly important as China and many other countries have been imposing more restrictive standards on imported waste.

2. Enhance effectiveness of waste separation bins

Waste separation bins have rolled out in public spaces for more than 15 years, yet the management of these bins is still called into question. The Government must improve public trust in the system by enhancing the accessibility and maintenance of public waste separation bins. At the same time, it should work with shopping mall and supermarket operators to set up recycling sites within their premises where possible to facilitate collection.

3. Set up a whistleblower system

Some are worried illegal dumping would become more severe if the charging scheme is implemented. The Government should take reference to Taiwan and South Korea in setting up a reward scheme to encourage whistleblowing and deter potential fly-tippers.

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4. Implement producer responsibility schemes

The MSW charging scheme alone cannot tackle Hong Kong's enormous waste generation. The Government needs to quickly implement accompanying producer responsibility schemes for plastic waste and packaging materials to apply the producer pays principle and reflect their true environmental cost. Producer responsibility schemes will encourage more sustainable product designs and accountability from manufacturers and retailers.

In the press conference following the release of the new blueprint, the Government has promised that landfills will not be necessary by 2035 with the second planned waste-to-energy plant. Without MSW charging however, the plant only serves to obscure, not address the excessive waste generation problem that Hong Kong has.

We have already seen how successful similar charging schemes have worked in other neighbouring cities. Numerous opinion polls carried out by various organisations over the past 15 years have shown that Hong Kong citizens are accepting and understand why MSW charging is needed. With the society ready, it is now time for our lawmakers to pass the bill.

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