

Adaptation period for new regulation on disposable plastic products to end tomorrow

â€‹The new regulation on disposable plastic products came into effect on April 22 this year. The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) reminds businesses that the six-month adaptation period will end tomorrow, October 21.

The EPD would like to remind all businesses again that the adaptation period will end soon. Those unprepared yet should take action as soon as possible to comply with the legal requirements. If businesses still have unused stock, they may consider discussing with suppliers for goods returning and exporting, or contacting relevant plastic recyclers for recycling and recovery. For enquiries and assistance, please contact the EPD hotline at 2838 3111.

The EPD spokesperson expressed gratitude for the strong support and active participation of the trades and members of the public in taking action to reduce disposable plastics. In the past half year since the legislation has been implemented, not only has it effectively reduced plastic consumption, but also successfully initiated a trend of waste reduction among members of the public.

The catering sector has generally reported that many takeaway customers have gradually adapted to bringing their own reusable cutlery. Chained restaurants have indicated that approximately 80 per cent of their customers have chosen not to require takeaway cutlery, and about 30 per cent of restaurants no longer provide any takeaway cutlery. It is estimated that since the implementation of the new "plastic-free" regulation, the catering industry has reduced the use of 30 million sets of disposable cutlery. This demonstrates that if everyone is willing to change their habits, such as bringing their own cutlery for takeaways, the use of disposable cutlery can largely be avoided in most situations. Disposable cutlery should only be used when necessary, and in such cases, non-plastic alternatives should be used.

Although there is an increasing number of members of the public bringing their own tableware for takeaways, non-plastic disposable tableware will continue to be in demand for a certain period of time. Since the implementation of the new regulation, the number of suppliers on the EPD's "Green Tableware Platform" (www.greentableware.hk) has increased from over 60 to more than 150, while the number of non-plastic alternative products has grown from over 1 000 to more than 1 700. With the increase in market supply and options for alternative tableware, prices have also decreased as compared to those before the regulation was implemented, thereby allowing the trade to choose more suitable alternatives based on customers' feedbacks. The department encourages the trade to visit the "Green Tableware Platform" or contact the EPD hotline at 2838 3111 for enquiries.

In the retail and services sectors, property management companies have revealed that most people have become accustomed to using umbrella dryers instead of disposable plastic umbrella bags, and many members of the public are also bringing their own reusable umbrella bags. The use of disposable plastic products, such as plastic balloon sticks, glow sticks, and party hats during festivals, has significantly decreased, with businesses co-operating by switching to selling alternative products.

The hotel sector has also pointed out that since the implementation of the new legislation, visitors have adapted well to the new measures, demonstrating general acceptance and support. At the same time, the usage of disposable plastic items has also significantly decreased by over 80 per cent. Taking a medium-sized hotel as an example, it has saved 20 000 plastic water bottles and 30 000 disposable plastic toiletry items, such as shampoo and shower gel sets, within just six months. With active co-operation of the trade, Hong Kong hotels' plastic-free measures have been positioned at the forefront internationally, with Hong Kong being recognised by an international travel website as one of the world's top nine sustainable travel destinations. In terms of alternatives, the hotel sector is also pleased to see that there are now various local and foreign suppliers supplying all regulated disposable plastic toiletry items. Looking ahead, with the continued promotion of a "plastic-free" culture, the options for non-plastic alternatives will increase further.

After the adaptation period, the EPD will continue to prioritise publicity and education while supplementing these efforts with appropriate enforcement action. Priority will be accorded to the supply sources, with primary efforts directed towards inspecting various retail outlets to ensure that these merchants comply with the law at source. At the retail level, the EPD will first inspect stores that were found non-compliant during the adaptation period. If a retailer is found to be non-compliant with the new legislation, a written warning will be issued on-site, requiring the responsible person to make improvements within 10 working days. If the business is still non-compliant thereafter, a fixed penalty notice will be issued to the responsible person. For other businesses such as catering and hotels, the EPD will also take action based on complaints. Upon receiving a complaint, inspections and investigations will be conducted. If violations are found, a warning letter will be issued to the responsible person requiring improvements within 10 working days. If non-compliance persists thereafter, a fixed penalty notice will also be issued to the responsible person.

The spokesperson concluded, "Many members of the public of Hong Kong have made unprecedented changes over the past six months to go "plastic-free". However, legislation is merely one of the tools, while our ultimate goal is to foster societal recognition and establish a "plastic-free" culture. Changing social customs and encouraging individuals to adopt new habits is no easy task. Solely relying on government initiatives will not suffice, and we would require the collective support of the society for success. The EPD appeals to all individuals, groups and organisations that support this goal to participate collaboratively and encourage others to

change their lifestyles by starting with the move towards "plastic-free". Together, we can promote a green and low-carbon living culture in Hong Kong and establish our ecological civilisation."