

ENB relief measures to provide financial support for the trade

To help the municipal solid waste (MSW) transfer sector cope with the current economic situation and the operational difficulties arising from the COVID-19 epidemic, the Government initiated the Subsidy Scheme for the Refuse Transfer Station Account Holders for Transporting MSW under the newly-announced anti-epidemic measures to allocate financial support of about \$7 million for the trade. The scheme was endorsed by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council today (April 18).

A spokesman for the Environment Bureau (ENB) said, "The Government's anti-epidemic relief measures include a \$21 billion initiative to provide 16 types of support for specific sectors. The subsidy scheme is one of the 16 support initiatives.

"The MSW transfer sector is facing a challenging business environment. To assist the trade in increasing resources to enhance the provision of workers' personal protective equipment and strengthen the disinfection of refuse transport vehicles to curb the risk of virus transmission and maintain environmental hygiene, the ENB has established the subsidy scheme. The scheme offers a one-off relief subsidy of \$8,000 to each of the eligible private MSW collectors operating in the first quarter of this year, i.e. every refuse transfer station account holder who transported MSW to refuse transfer stations or landfills between January 1 and March 31 of this year, to support the industry in coping with the challenges," the spokesman added.

The subsidy scheme is expected to benefit about 800 private MSW collectors, of which 70 per cent are individual refuse transfer station account holders. To ease the application procedures, the Environmental Protection Department will post cheques to recipients of this special subsidy in about a week after the funding endorsement, with a view to relieving difficulties of the trade as soon as possible.

In addition to the above subsidy scheme, the ENB will create environmental protection-related time-limited jobs in the coming two years and strengthen its existing relief measures.

On relief measures regarding sewage charges, the Government announced last December a provision of some \$120 million to waive 75 per cent of sewage charges for non-domestic accounts for four months. The Budget further provided \$120 million to extend the waiver period for four months. Under the current anti-epidemic measures, the Government has allocated an extra \$120 million to waive sewage charges for another four months, from August to November this year, making the total waiver period 12 months. Some 250 000 non-domestic accounts will benefit from this, subject to a monthly cap of \$12,500 per account. The relevant relief measures will be implemented after revisions of the Government regulations concerned. Non-domestic account

holders are expected to receive respective bills reflecting the waiver in the second or third quarter of this year.

On rental concession arrangements, eligible tenants of EcoPark, country park refreshment kiosks and Hong Kong Wetland Park under the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department received a rental concession of 50 per cent from October 2019 to March this year. The rental concession period has been extended for another six months to September this year. Under the current anti-epidemic measures, the rental concessions from April to September this year will be increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. The total rental waiver for the entire 12-month period amounts to more than \$17 million.

The Recycling Fund (RF) last year launched the "One-off Rental Support Scheme", benefiting about 500 street-corner recycling shops and 400 recycling sites. The scheme, which originally ran from October 2019 to March this year, has been extended for six months to September this year, with a total provision of about \$200 million for the covered period. To tie in with the Government's epidemic measures, the RF has further earmarked funding of about \$50 million to increase the rental subsidies from 50 per cent to 75 per cent for the subsidy period from April to September this year. The maximum monthly rental subsidy for each recycler will be increased from \$25,000 to \$37,500, setting the maximum total rental subsidy for the 12-month period at \$375,000.