

ENB to introduce bill on municipal solid waste charging

The Environment Bureau (ENB) announced today (October 31) that the Waste Disposal (Charging for Municipal Solid Waste) (Amendment) Bill 2018 will be introduced into the Legislative Council (LegCo) on November 14. The Bill proposes to adopt two charging modes, namely "charging by designated garbage bags" and "charging by weight", to implement municipal solid waste (MSW) charging based on the "polluter-pays" principle and the existing waste collection system.

The Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, said, "Sitting at the centre of our overall waste reduction strategy is the implementation of MSW charging, which will provide the necessary financial incentives to drive behavioural and cultural changes, and encourage different sectors of the community to cherish resources and proactively practise waste reduction at source as well as clean recycling, thus reducing overall waste disposal. In recent years, the per capita disposal rate of MSW of Hong Kong has been increasing. In 2016, the daily disposal of MSW reached 1.41 kilograms per person, which is higher than those of other major cities. To combat global climate change, it is imperative to promote resources saving as well as waste reduction and recycling in order to reduce carbon emissions and facilitate a transformation to low-carbon living. In Seoul and Taipei City, waste disposal dropped by some 30 per cent in the initial period after quantity-based waste charging was introduced. This demonstrates that a charging scheme can reduce waste effectively."

Mr Wong said the ENB has been consulting the public and the trades for some time in the past on this policy and its implementation arrangements, through public consultation and the extensive public engagement process conducted by the Council for Sustainable Development in 2013, to build understanding of and support for MSW charging in the community. The Government subsequently took on board the views from stakeholders and modified the proposed charging arrangements in October last year by expanding the use of pre-paid designated garbage bags to cover around 80 per cent of MSW disposal. The remaining 20 per cent will be charged by a "gate-fee" based on the weight of MSW disposed. The trades and the public generally find this modified charging mode and mechanism agreeable.

The Government also attaches great importance to further promoting waste reduction and recycling in order to complement the implementation of MSW charging. The Policy Address recently announced that the Government will provide additional recurrent resources to strengthen its work on these fronts. The Government will provide an additional provision of around \$300-400 million for the 2019-20 financial year to start with, which would be further increased to no less than \$800-1,000 million from the financial year when MSW charging is to be implemented. The amount of this annual provision would be commensurate with the estimated gross revenue to be generated from MSW charging, so as to achieve the effect of "dedicated-fund-for-dedicated-

use". This means that the revenue from MSW charging will be used to enhance the work relating to waste reduction and recycling.

Mr Wong added, "It is a very challenging task to implement MSW charging. The Government has formulated a pragmatic strategy to implement MSW charging. We will make use of additional resources to strengthen support for waste reduction and recycling work, including the setting up of outreaching teams under the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) to provide on-site assistance to the community, thereby putting waste reduction and recycling and MSW charging into practice; also the provision of a free territory-wide collection service in respect of waste plastics from non-commercial and industrial (C&I) sources and food waste from all sources in the longer run subject to the experiences gained from the pilot schemes on non-C&I waste plastics and C&I food waste, as well as the progress of developing food waste recovery centres in Hong Kong; and implementation of a pilot scheme to assess the effectiveness of applying reverse vending machines in promoting the recycling of plastic beverage containers."

He said that public education and publicity hold the key to the implementation of MSW charging. Starting from now, the Government will further step up public education and publicity to encourage the public to practise waste reduction and recycling, as well as enhance the community's understanding of MSW charging arrangements, so as to facilitate implementation of this important waste reduction initiative. The EPD will launch a dedicated website on MSW charging (www.mswcharging.gov.hk) today to assist different sectors of the community to better understand the details of MSW charging. Promotional videos and pamphlets will be made available later to explain the proposed implementation arrangements of MSW charging and provide detailed and specific information to individual sectors.

The Government will put in place a preparatory period of 12 to 18 months after the passage of the Bill to provide the Government, different stakeholders and the public with appropriate time to prepare for the implementation of MSW charging.

"The implementation date for MSW charging is subject to various interplaying factors. We estimate that MSW charging could be implemented by end-2020 at the earliest. The Government will continue to solicit support from various sectors of the community with a view to facilitating the passage of the Bill and implementing MSW charging to drive behavioural changes as soon as possible, hence achieving reduction of both waste and carbon emissions," Mr Wong said.

The Bill will be published in the Gazette this Friday (November 2) and introduced into the LegCo for first and second readings on November 14.