

EPD responds to concerns regarding implementation of municipal solid waste charging

In response to recent media reports on the implementation of municipal solid waste (MSW) charging on April 1, 2024, as well as concerns raised by citizens and groups of different sectors, a spokesperson for the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) said, "These views reflect that society is starting to show concern towards the implementation of MSW charging from April 1, 2024, onwards and its relevant legislative requirements. Since the legislation relating to MSW charging was passed by the Legislative Council (LegCo) in August 2021, the EPD has conducted various preparatory work, such as launching promotional and educational activities, continuously enhancing recycling facilities, and maintaining close communication and co-operation with stakeholders from all sectors to prepare for the implementation of MSW charging together."

On publicity, since August 2023, the EPD has been continuously publicising the commencement date and details of MSW charging through major media by phases. As at end December 2023, the EPD has broadcast Announcements in the Public Interest on television and radio about 4 000 times (i.e. about 30 times per day on average); broadcast promotional videos on over 9 000 display monitors at public transport stations, on vehicles, at shopfronts of restaurants and at lift lobbies; displayed over 1 200 banners at roadsides in various districts, government facilities and public rental housing (PRH) estates; displayed advertisements on 240 buses, 100 public light buses and 18 ferries; displayed posters on over 2 000 advertising light boxes at public transport stations and lift lobbies; and displayed online advertisements on about 100 mobile applications and websites relating to news and everyday matters, etc. The EPD has planned to start publicising the sales arrangements of designated bags and labels later this month. The promotional activities on MSW charging shall continue until end 2024.

MSW charging goes hand in hand with waste reduction and recycling. On strengthening the support for recycling facilities at the district level, the EPD has been continuously expanding its community recycling network GREEN@COMMUNITY during the past three years. There are currently over 170 public collection points in Hong Kong, including 11 Recycling Stations, 34 Recycling Stores (the first Recycling Store located in an MTR station, namely GREEN@TSING YI, will come into operation in the first quarter of 2024), and over 130 Recycling Spots operating weekly at fixed times and locations in the form of kerb-side collection booths. GREEN@COMMUNITY has always been well received by the public. It received over 5 million visits for clean recycling in 2023, and there are over 400 000 registered accounts for the GREEN\$ Participation Incentive Scheme. Moreover, the EPD will establish small-scale Recycling Stores in 50 PRH estates progressively. It has recently completed the relevant tender assessment and will award service contracts shortly,

thereby providing a more convenient means for PRH and nearby residents to practise clean recycling so as to complement the implementation of MSW charging on April 1, 2024. Three of the small-scale Recycling Stores have already commenced operation, including GREEN@KWAI FONG, GREEN@TAI WO HAU and GREEN@KAI YIP, with the rest of these Recycling Stores to commence operation gradually from this month onwards.

There have been quite a number of concerns on the recycling of food waste, which accounts for 30 per cent of the total volume of MSW disposal. The EPD has been continuously expanding the collection service for food waste over the past year, including collecting food waste from more public and private premises and areas where restaurants are concentrated. In September 2023, the EPD completed the installation of smart recycling bins for collecting food waste in 100 blocks of PRH estates, which is six months earlier than the original target schedule. The total volume of food waste recovered has reached about 200 tonnes per day, representing a 30 per cent increase from last year. The EPD is actively collaborating with the Housing Department and the Hong Kong Housing Society to gradually expand the food waste collection service to all PRH estates within 2024, with the service currently covering 70 PRH estates. Additionally, since December 29, 2023, the Environmental Campaign Committee has started accepting applications from private housing estates with at least 1 000 households for subsidies to install smart food waste recycling bins and provide related maintenance services for a duration of two years, so as to further encourage the recycling of domestic food waste.

To further encourage recycling efforts, the Environment and Ecology Bureau will introduce two bills into LegCo later this year, including requiring property management companies and owners' organisations of private residential buildings to separately collect common types of recyclables and pass the recyclables collected to downstream recyclers for processing, with a view to implementing the legislation by end 2024; and establishing a common legislative framework for producer responsibility schemes (PRSs), as well as formulating subsidiary legislations, to gradually implement PRSs for five types of products, including plastic beverage containers, beverage cartons, electric vehicle batteries, vehicle tyres and lead-acid batteries, starting from 2025.

The EPD has maintained close communication with different sectors and they have jointly formulated eight Best Practice Guides for different trades to prepare for the implementation of MSW charging. As at end December 2023, the EPD has conducted 52 online meetings and briefings for the property management trade and owners' organisations, reaching out to over 6 000 stakeholders. To facilitate the property management industry in better understanding the arrangements of MSW charging, the EPD is working with the Property Management Services Authority to organise trainings on MSW charging under its Continuing Professional Development Scheme, which are open for applications by holders of the Property Management Practitioner Licence to enhance their skills in handling property management duties. The EPD has also been arranging meetings with District Council members to introduce to them to the operational details of MSW charging and consult them on publicity at the

district level. We have now confirmed our attendance at meetings of District Councils or its subsidiary committees for seven Districts and will continue to liaise with the District Officers of other Districts to confirm the dates of the meetings.

The spokesperson said, "Some people are worried that citizens may deposit waste at public places illegally after the implementation of MSW charging, while some others have misunderstood that the Government will not prosecute persons who litter during the six-month phasing-in period upon the commencement of MSW charging. We must emphasise that the phasing-in period only serves to assist the public in developing the practice of depositing waste with the use of designated bags and that the Government will not tolerate any littering activity which gravely impacts public hygiene and harms the living environment of citizens. Our enforcement agencies will continue to take enforcement actions against littering activities even during the phasing-in period of MSW charging, and serve upon persons who litter in public places fixed penalty tickets with a fixed penalty of \$3,000, regardless of whether such persons have used designated bags or designated labels, under the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness and Obstruction) Ordinance (Cap. 570). Furthermore, we understand that it is a common practice for citizens to clean up their homes before Lunar New Year. We encourage these citizens to properly separate recyclables from general waste when cleaning up and pass the waste and the recyclables to refuse collection points and GREEN@COMMUNITY collection points respectively during their operating hours, so as to enhance public hygiene and facilitate resources circulation. The Government will strengthen the manpower at these collection points, with details to be announced later. The public may also earn GREEN\$ points when recycling at GREEN@COMMUNITY facilities during their operating hours."

The EPD welcomes citizens and people from various sectors to express their views and concerns for the better implementation of MSW charging.