

EPD successfully intercepts illegal import of municipal waste by sea (with photos)

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) intercepted earlier a case of illegal import of municipal waste from Canada at the Kwai Tsing Container Terminals (KTCTs). The importer involved, namely SIRG HK Limited, was convicted and fined \$15,000 at Fanling Magistrates' Courts today (March 2) for contravening the Waste Disposal Ordinance (WDO).

In November 2019, EPD enforcement officers inspected two sea containers, which were claimed to contain ABS plastics, at the KTCTs. They intercepted about 41 tonnes of waste with a mix of waste plastics, waste printed circuit boards, waste wires, waste paper and waste wood, etc. The EPD immediately repatriated all the intercepted waste to the place of origin and notified the local enforcement authorities concerned about the return shipment. The EPD also instituted prosecution against the importer involved under the WDO.

An EPD spokesman said that to prevent Hong Kong from becoming a dumping ground for imported waste, or a distribution hub for the illegal re-export of waste, the department has been closely exchanging intelligence and collaborating with the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) on the interception of waste of various types entering Hong Kong illegally through different channels. In recent years, the cases of illegal import of municipal waste, mainly originating in Europe and the United States, have been rising. The EPD intercepted five cases and six cases of illegal import of municipal waste in 2020 and 2019 respectively, a significant increase as compared to only one case over the three-year period from 2016 to 2018. In view of this increasing trend, the EPD will continue to enhance intelligence exchanges and risk analyses with overseas competent authorities, and work with the C&ED to inspect suspicious containers to combat these illegal activities.

The spokesman stressed that municipal waste is a controlled waste, and its import is subject to control under the WDO. The imported municipal waste generally does not have a high recycling value, thus most of the waste will eventually be delivered to the landfills for disposal, taking up the limited landfill space in Hong Kong. Improper disposal of municipal waste will also pollute the environment and cause harm to public health. The EPD will continue to rigorously combat the illegal import and export of controlled waste and bring offenders to justice.

The spokesman reminded importers and exporters of the waste recycling trade that anyone who imports or exports controlled waste without obtaining a valid permit beforehand commits an offence under the WDO. First-time offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and six months' imprisonment. For subsequent offences, offenders are liable to a fine up to \$500,000 and two years' imprisonment.

