

LCQ20: Assisting schools in implementing municipal solid waste charging

Following is a question by the Hon Chu Kwok-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (January 31):

Question:

The Government will implement municipal solid waste charging this year with two charging modes, either through the purchase and use of pre-paid designated bags (DBs) or designated labels, or through a "gate-fee" based on the weight of waste. However, many schools have relayed to me that it is difficult to estimate the relevant costs, including the cost of purchasing DBs or designated labels, and the cost of being charged by private waste collectors based on the weight of waste. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current average daily quantity of solid waste disposal by public sector primary and secondary schools;

(2) whether the Education Bureau (EDB) will provide DBs and designated labels to public sector primary and secondary schools; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether the EDB will allocate additional grants to schools for the purchase of DBs and designated labels; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) of the specific measures put in place by the Government to enhance waste reduction and promote recycling in schools?

Reply:

President,

Municipal solid waste (MSW) charging sits at the centre of the Government's overall waste reduction strategy. It encourages the community to cherish resources, reduce waste at source and practise clean recycling by using financial disincentives with a view to reducing the overall waste disposal amount. In consultation with the Environment and Ecology Bureau (EEB), the reply to the question raised by the Hon Chu Kwok-keung is as follows:

(1), (2) and (4) As schools are not major waste producers, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) does not maintain statistics on the quantity of

solid waste produced and disposed of by them. Nevertheless, education which nurtures the public to develop the habit of waste reduction at source and clean recycling is particularly important. Therefore, the Government attaches great importance to the promotion and educational work on MSW charging at the school level. The EPD is now arranging the information on MSW charging, including publicity publications, posters, banners and electronic leaflets, etc, for displaying in all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong and for distributing to students, school staff and parent groups of all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong by email. To encourage students to proactively bring home the information on MSW charging to share with their families after receiving the information at school, the EPD will also distribute a 15-litre designated bag to each of the around 350 000 primary school students, so as to achieve "influencing families through younger family members" and promote the information on MSW charging to every household more effectively.

The Government continues to implement environmental education in schools through diversified modes. In terms of curriculum, education for sustainable development (including the content of environmental education and green living) has always been integrated in different Key Learning Areas or subjects of secondary and primary schools, with a view to cultivating environmental awareness and attitudes, and promoting green living among students. The Education Bureau (EDB) will keep in view the implementation and development of MSW charging, and liaise with relevant departments timely to obtain information for the preparation of learning and teaching resources for teachers' use within and beyond the classroom, thereby educating students to cherish resources and practise waste reduction at source, and to protect the environment together.

The EPD has been collaborating with the Environmental Campaign Committee (ECC) in implementing the Waste Separation and Recycling Scheme in Schools. Participating schools are provided with three-colour waste separation bins for free to help students learn about the importance of cherishing resources and the concept of waste separation, as well as encouraging schools to separate waste papers, plastic bottles and metals for recycling. The ECC has so far provided three-colour waste separation bins to a total of 1 028 primary and secondary schools. Besides, the ECC has provided training activities (including talks, workshops and field visits, etc) and relevant guidelines to primary and secondary school students through the Student Environmental Protection Ambassador Scheme and Green Prefect Programme to enhance students' awareness of waste reduction and recycling and encourage them to practise waste separation and waste reduction in school and daily life, thereby adopting a low-carbon lifestyle. Details of the relevant activities have been uploaded onto the ECC's "Schools Go Green" webpage for reference by the general public.

To facilitate the implementation of MSW charging, the EPD's Green Outreach has all along been organising different types of publicity, promotional and educational activities on waste reduction and recycling in collaboration with relevant stakeholders (including schools) basing on the needs of the community. The operators of the community recycling network, GREEN@COMMUNITY, have also organised activities from time to time, such as

environmental education activities and site visits to community recycling facilities to learn about their operations. In the past three years, there was a total of around 1 300 publicity and promotional activities in various forms in which schools participated in or co-organised, attracting more than 45 000 participants. Depending on the contents of activities, the Green Outreach and the operators of GREEN@COMMUNITY would invite the participation of schools in the district so as to educate students about the knowledge of waste separation and recycling, encourage them to bring home the relevant messages and integrate the habit of waste reduction and recycling into their daily lives.

The EEB has also strengthened the education for students on waste reduction and encouraging recycling through the Sustainable Development School Outreach Programme in this school year, including organising more than 30 seminars related to "Plastic-free Life", "Food Cherisher" and "Green Living", as well as arranging about 40 field trips and workshops by visiting the Organic Resources Recovery Centre Phase 1 (O·PARK1), Sludge Treatment Facility (T·PARK), Yard Waste Recycling Centre (Y·PARK) and GREEN@COMMUNITY. Through these activities, we have introduced the sources, types and treatment of MSW to over 8 800 teachers and students and encouraged them to practise waste reduction and recycling in their daily lives.

Moreover, the EEB and the ECC have put in place the GreenLink – Environmental Education Support Programme (GreenLink), with funding from the Environment and Conservation Fund, to provide schools with one-stop dedicated support services on environmental education. The GreenLink contractor will assist teachers in arranging environmental education activities, such as talks, booth games, field trips, workshops, guided tours and green dramas, etc, on various environmental issues for students to nurture their environmental awareness. Schools may enquire about details of the programme through GreenLink's dedicated hotline (3488 5178), email address (greenlink_eesp@ce3.org.hk) or website (www.greenlinkeesp.com.hk).

(3) The EDB will actively assist schools to formulate and put in place school-based environmental policy with reference to the guidelines and other relevant information provided by the EPD to prepare for the implementation of MSW charging. The EDB will maintain close collaboration with the EEB/EPD and provide schools with latest information and appropriate support. Aided schools can make use of the Operating Expenses Block Grant/Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant provided by the EDB to cover expenditure incurred from cleaning of school premises, including MSW charging, in accordance with the principles on usage of the grant and the school-based circumstances and needs.