

Works contractor and chemical waste collector convicted of illegally handling asbestos waste (with photo)

A works contractor, Wo Hing Construction Company Limited, and a licensed chemical waste collector, Utilities Construction Limited, were convicted and fined a total of \$16,500 at Kwun Tong Magistrates' Courts today (May 6) for contravening the Waste Disposal Ordinance (WDO) and the Waste Disposal (Chemical Waste) (General) Regulation as a result of illegally handling asbestos waste.

In May last year, enforcement officers of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) carried out a blitz operation to combat waste collectors illegally transporting or disposing of waste. During the operation, it was discovered that the packing for asbestos waste handled by the above-mentioned licensed chemical waste collector was damaged during transport. The asbestos exposed posed serious health risks to workers and members of the public.

After an investigation, the EPD confirmed that the works contractor involved failed to give the EPD a notification before disposing of asbestos waste. The chemical waste collector also did not deliver asbestos waste to a disposal facility within 48 hours in accordance with the law, and failed to fill out statutory trip tickets during the delivery of the asbestos waste. The EPD then prosecuted the two companies under the WDO and the Waste Disposal (Chemical Waste) (General) Regulation.

A spokesperson for the EPD said asbestos waste is classified as chemical waste. Inhalation of asbestos fibres can cause serious diseases such as asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. Relevant works contractors must register as chemical waste producers with the EPD in accordance with the law, and properly package, label and store asbestos waste. In addition, with the aim of facilitating the relevant landfill to make proper arrangements, works contractors must give the EPD prior notifications if they wish to transport asbestos waste to the relevant landfill for disposal.

Anyone illegally collecting, storing or handling chemical waste will be prosecuted. First-time offenders may be liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and six months' imprisonment. A maximum fine of \$500,000 and two years' imprisonment may be imposed on a subsequent conviction.

For more information about the control of chemical waste, please visit the EPD's website:

www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/environmentinhk/waste/guide_ref/guide_cwc.html.

