

## Closing Remarks

By Mr K K Kwok, Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Environment)/ Director of Environmental Protection

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to thank the organizers for giving me the chance to round up this very important conference. No doubt the inspiring speeches, presentations, and discussions have given everyone much food for thought. This conference is timely as the Government is currently working towards publishing a strategy document on waste management. The waste problem that Hong Kong is facing is real, urgent and serious. We need to act now, or we will end up generating tremendous amounts of waste but having nowhere to dispose of it in six to 10 years' time when the landfills run out of room.

To tackle the imminent problem, a definitive and agreed way forward to resolve the problem is needed. The solution lies in a comprehensive plan that tackles the issues on all fronts. While continuing with the existing measures and efforts in waste reduction, recovery and recycling, and waste disposal, we need to draw up an overall strategy for the management of municipal solid waste and take prompt actions.

### **Multifaceted nature of waste management**

The nature of waste management is multifaceted. In today's conference, the subject of waste management strategy was examined from four very different but inter-connected perspectives: the environmental perspective, the economic perspective, the community perspective, and the policy perspective. The primary objective of a waste management strategy is of course to solve the environmental problems. But we must not confine ourselves to environmental considerations alone, as a waste management strategy must also make economic sense and command the support of the community for it to be effective and sustainable. The presentations and discussions this morning have offered many insights in all the four perspectives.

When we look at the toolbox for waste management, again we see a wide variety of measures available to us. Some speakers have shared with us various alternative technologies for waste treatment. We have composting, anaerobic digestion and gasification and so on. Friends from businesses have proposed various financial instruments. We have product responsibility schemes and charging etc. Not to mention the numerous variations for every instrument. And of course we have legislative and administrative measures. I would like to emphasise that we need to deploy many of these measures so as to tackle the waste problem on all fronts. We need to work on all three elements of waste management, namely waste reduction, waste recovery and recycling, and final treatment and disposal. We cannot afford to miss any of the three. There is no question of choosing one and dropping the others. Many of the measures raised by speakers today need to work together to achieve the maximum impact. I think this point has been illustrated by the experience of Taipei and Toronto. Both cities have drawn up an aggressive waste management plan and are on their way towards achieving the goals set out in the plans. Both governments are deploying a comprehensive set of tools simultaneously. I am sure Hong Kong has much to learn from their experience.

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### **Partnership**

My second observation is that public-private partnership is vital in waste management and that the business sector is ready to play its part.

The Government is determined to take proactive actions to solve the waste problem. Nevertheless, the Government cannot go it alone, as it takes all of us in the society to solve the waste problem. Participation of every individual in the society is the key to sustainable waste management. In the past when we talked about environmental protection it always seemed that the Government was coercing the businesses to do what they didn't want to do through laws and fines. This is untrue. Instead, all of us are responsible for the environment we live in and we should work together to preserve it for our future generations. I am pleased to see that many speakers today have pointed out the importance of partnership between government and industries. The Government and the business sector need to work hand in hand to solve the waste problem.

There are many ways in which the Government and business can work together. The most basic form of cooperation is of course to have businesses responding to Government's policies actively. I appreciate the efforts of the business sector in this regard but I will ask for more. You know best how you can contribute to the environment. We need initiatives from you and I trust that the business sector is ready to do so. This conference is in itself a very good example of initiative from the business sector. I expect to see more and more ideas and projects from this source. I would appeal to you for your continued support to environmental protection. I also urge you to spread the message to those around you so that more will join us in fostering a closer partnership.

### **Waste Treatment Technology**

My third observation is about alternative waste treatment technologies. No matter how successful we are in reducing and recycling waste there will still be a considerable amount of waste that needs to be properly disposed of. Landfilling is not sustainable for a place as small as Hong Kong. Taking into account the lead time needed to plan for and develop a facility to treat our waste, a decision on the technologies to be adopted in Hong Kong has to be made sooner rather than later.

The issue has attracted much attention in the public and in the media. We welcome such attention as the issue is indeed of great significance for Hong Kong. The public should of course participate in this important discussion. The last thing we want is a discussion based on fragmented or incomplete information. We have had some very robust discussions backed up by facts and overseas experiences on the issue today in this conference. I hope to see the same happening in the society at large.



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Lastly, I wish to thank all the speakers and participants in this conference for sharing their views and experience in respect of solid waste management. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Business Environment Council for organising this conference and all the supporters of the event. I would particularly wish to congratulate the organisers on the success of the conference today.

Thank you.