

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

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) successfully intercepted earlier a case of illegally imported regulated waste plastics from Germany at the COSCO-HIT Container Terminals. The importer involved, namely CK Environmental Technology Limited, was convicted and fined a total of \$5,800 at Fanling Magistrates' Courts today (May 3) for contravening the Waste Disposal Ordinance (WDO).

Concern about transboundary movement of waste plastics has been growing in international society and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (BC), which regulates the global transboundary movements of waste plastics, adopted an amendment passed at the Conference of the Parties in May 2019, regulating the transboundary movement of designated types of waste plastics from January 1, 2021, including mixed, contaminated waste plastics or those not able to be recovered in an environmentally sound manner (together regarded as "regulated waste plastics"). Following amendments to the BC, the EPD enhanced the import and export control of waste plastics in Hong Kong from January 1, 2021, through the WDO. Any person who imports, exports or re-exports regulated waste plastics into, from or via Hong Kong must apply for the relevant waste import/export permit in accordance with the WDO or obtain consent from the EPD in advance. As for importing, exporting or re-exporting non-regulated waste plastics into, from or via Hong Kong, a declaration form and relevant documents should be submitted to the EPD in advance for record purposes. This is to prove that the planned transboundary movement of waste plastics is not subject to the control under the BC.

In October 2021, the EPD investigated and identified a suspicious case claiming to import recycled waste plastics, and thus jointly intercepted the container concerned with the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED), and found about 20 tonnes of mixed waste plastics belonging to the category of regulated waste plastics. As no import/export permit nor consent had been obtained from the EPD for the intercepted regulated waste plastics, the EPD immediately repatriated all the waste plastics to the place of origin and notified the local enforcement authorities concerned about the return shipments for their follow-up. The EPD also instituted prosecution against the importer involved under the WDO.

A spokesman for the EPD said that waste mixed with a large amount of different types of waste plastics will affect the recycling process and the quality of recyclables. Waste generated during the recycling process would take up the limited landfill space in Hong Kong. Improper handling of the waste would also pollute the environment. The EPD will continue to enhance the intelligence exchange and risk analysis with overseas enforcement

authorities, and work with the C&ED to inspect suspicious containers to combat such illegal import activities involving regulated waste plastics.

The spokesman reminded importers and exporters of the waste recycling trade not to illegally import (including import into or transshipment through Hong Kong) or export regulated waste plastics. According to 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 of \$500,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The EPD has issued guidelines on the import and export control of waste plastics for reference of members of the public and the trade. The guidelines can be downloaded from the EPD's website:

www.epd.gov.hk/epd/sites/default/files/epd/english/environmentinhk/waste/guide_ref/files/WastePlastics_Guidelines_eng.pdf.

