

Ombudsman probes into management and effectiveness of waste separation bins (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (November 30) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the management of waste separation bins by the Environment Bureau and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), and the effectiveness of the relevant programme.

In 1998, the Government announced the Waste Reduction Framework Plan, advocating separate collection of recyclable materials to facilitate recovery and reuse. According to the Plan, government departments are required to place waste separation bins (commonly referred to as "three-colour recycling bins") at locations under their management for collection of waste paper, aluminium cans and plastic bottles, thereby encouraging the public to participate in waste reduction and recycling. The departments involved include the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Housing Department and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. Through the Source Separation of Waste Programme, the EPD has also distributed recycling bins to participating estates as well as commercial and industrial buildings. As at early 2020, there were about 17 000 sets of recycling bins throughout the territory, covering over 80 per cent of the population.

Contrary to the Government's target of raising the local recovery rate of municipal solid waste to 55 per cent by 2022, the rate decreased year by year from 37 per cent in 2014 to 30 per cent in 2018. Meanwhile, there have been frequent media reports on recycling bins often overflowing with litter, which polluted the collected recyclables and affected recycling effectiveness, as well as causing environmental hygiene problems. The media has also reported on some contracted recyclers' dumping of recyclables collected from the recycling bins into landfills, thus wasting the recycling efforts of the public and undermining their confidence in the authorities' effective management of the recycling bins.

Ms Chiu said, "Waste reduction and recycling is a topic of community concern. Though introduced for years, the waste separation bins' effectiveness is still called into question. I therefore initiate this direct investigation to examine the management of waste separation bins by the departments concerned and their effectiveness in implementing the relevant programme, with a view to making improvement recommendations where necessary."

The Ombudsman is inviting information and views from members of the public on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The

Ombudsman by December 30, 2020:

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