

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Wu Yee Sun College

GEYS 4010
Final Project Report

MSW Charging
Group 3

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1. Introduction

a) Background Information

Considering the fact that the three existing landfills in Hong Kong are saturated and predicted to be filled up in the following years, the Hong Kong government decided to implement the MSW Charging Scheme. With the aim of 1. enhancing waste reduction and recycling, 2. creating green opportunities, and 3. reducing carbon emissions, the Government intends to promote sustainable and green lifestyles to the public.

The MSW Charging Scheme will cover domestic, commercial, and industrial waste and will be charged based on the designated bags, labels, or weight. The MSW Charging Scheme was originally scheduled to be launched on 1/4/2024; however, due to unforeseeable reasons or factors, it was postponed until 1/8/2024 for full implementation. (MSW Charging, 2024)

We predicted 4 possible factors that might influence the policy implementation, which include a lack of habits in recycling, no clear guidelines for the policy, insufficient knowledge of the policy, and collaboration between stakeholders.

First of all, most people in Hong Kong throw their rubbish into the rubbish bin. With a lack of habits in recycling, we believe it is hard for the public to adopt a new habit in a short time under the strict MSW charging policy. Besides, without clear guidelines for the MSW charging, such as guidelines for tracing illegal waste disposal, we believe it will cause confusion. Furthermore, many elderly and non-local people are still unfamiliar with the charging method. With insufficient knowledge of the MSW Charging, we believe it will lower public engagement towards the policy. Lastly, MSW Charging requires collaboration between many stakeholders, including but not limited to the government with cleaning companies and property management companies with employed cleaning staff. We believe the complex collaboration between stakeholders may lead to a more timely preparation time for policy implementation.

To conclude, MSW charging, as a trending current social issue that grabs public attention while bringing confusion and uncertainties to the public, our group decided to dive deep into this topic, to examine the policy from a new perspective.

b) Our Project

After evaluating the major stakeholders in the MSW Charging, we have selected cleaning staff as our target group in the project. The first reason is that although they are the major stakeholders in the policy, they receive less attention than other stakeholders or wordings like ‘charging details’, ‘citizen’, ‘government’, etc. The second reason is related to the possible negative impacts that MSW Charging will bring on cleaning staff. According to recent news from HKTKWW, it showed that although the public understands that illegal disposal will ‘做死清潔工友’, there is still a serious problem of littering in Hong Kong. Therefore, it is predictable that cleaning staff will need to work on more tasks with longer working hours after the implementation of MSW charging. (HKTKWW, 2024)

Understanding that the implementation of MSW Charging might have a huge impact on society, especially the cleaning staff, we set an objective for our project:

To examine the Municipal Solid Waste Charging Policy in Hong Kong from the cleaning staff's perspective through interviews.

2. Research

a) Ethnographic Approach

To ensure a better understanding of the impacts of the MSW Charging policy on our target group, we did the project research using the ethnographic approach.

b) Site Visit

We conducted a site visit at a residential area in Choi Hung to observe the waste disposal habits of the public and the daily tasks of the cleaning staff.

During the site visit, we observed several problems existing in Hong Kong. First of all, there is a serious problem of littering in residential areas. According to Figure 2 in the Appendix, the residents throw their large-sized waste illegally in public spaces. Besides, there are problems like high-rise littering and misuse of recycling bins. We observed one to two individuals who recycled their plastic waste into the yellow recycling bins, which demonstrated the lack of knowledge in recycling among the public. In addition, we observed the problem of misuse of the smart food waste bins. To understand the reason, we had a closer look at the guidelines of the smart food waste bins and found their guidelines too complicated and misleading, which might lead to confusion for potential users.

c) Interview

After observing the public's waste disposal and recycling habits, we interviewed cleaning staff to understand their attitude towards the MSW Charging policy and their comments on the public's current waste disposal habits.

We interviewed 6 major stakeholders in total, which include a cleaning staff in a residential area, a cleaning staff in the park, a security staff in the park, a cleaning staff in the wet market, a cleaning staff working at Wu Yee Sun College and a Wu Yee Sun College staff.

Through interviews, we received valuable feedback from major stakeholders that was useful for our project and supported our previous observations during the site visit.

d) Email Consultation

Considering that most of the cleaning staff in Hong Kong are employed by cleaning companies, we sent interview invitations to large-scale cleaning companies in Hong Kong, such as Baguio, to consult them regarding the MSW charging policy. Through email consultation, we aimed to gain a better understanding of companies' actions towards the MSW charging policy, including the guidelines offered to cleaning staff, collaboration with property management offices, etc.

3. Findings & Implications

a) Training and Guideline

Regarding the provision of training and guidance for the cleaning staff, our findings indicate that the majority of organisations and institutions are currently unprepared to handle the implementation of the MSW billing policy. The cleaning staff are perplexed and uncertain about the subsequent course of action outlined in the policy. Both the cleaning staff employed by Nixon Cleaning Company in a residential neighbourhood and in an urban public park, as well as the cleaning staff in Wu Yee Sun College, have stated that they have never received any training or been provided with any guidelines related to the policy. During the site visit, there was only one cleaning staff member employed by an outsourcing business at the wet market waste collection site. He informed us that his organisation has implemented a guideline for staff members, emphasising the need to maximise recycling efforts.

b) Workload

Prior to embarking on the site visit and conducting interviews, we needed to undertake preliminary research on the present state of public trash dumping. Based on our web research, we inferred that before the policy's adoption, people were disposing of large quantities of rubbish. Consequently, there is likely a substantial volume of waste at present, which could result in an overwhelming burden for the cleaning staff. Indeed, the present workload is deemed satisfactory. The majority of the cleaning staff we interviewed expressed that the present quantity of garbage is deemed reasonable. The cleaning staff in the residential area assert that there has been no significant increase or decrease in the amount of waste since the implementation of the policy. Their comment suggested that residents do not aggressively litter prior to the implementation of the regulation.

Nevertheless, the cleaning staff express apprehension regarding their future burden. According to the MSW billing policy, the cost of trash disposal will be determined based on either its weight or its volume. The cleaning staff working in institutions would face significant difficulty due to the institutions' practice of billing for municipal solid waste for people utilising their facilities. For instance, the cleaning staff assigned to the hostel area of Wu Yee Sun College informed us that they believe they'll be obligated to make full use of the designated garbage bag if the policy is enforced, with the aim of reducing the institution's operational expenses. The cleaning staff expressed apprehension that such practice would have a significant health impact on them, such as back pain. Simultaneously, it will diminish their productivity. They could require more time to manage their workload following the implementation of the policy.

“依家啲大袋塞半袋都已經好重，到時要塞滿一袋，大大袋咁，一個人根本攞唔到，我哋都會做慢咗，又會腰背勞損。” The cleaning staff working in the hostel area of Wu Yee Sun College said.

Simultaneously, due to the fact that a significant number of municipal cleaning staff are in their middle age or even surpass the official retirement age, some of them express apprehension about their ability to manage the more intricate work procedures associated with the implementation of new policies. For example, the janitor working at the garbage collecting

facility in the wet market asserts that he would quit after the policy takes effect since his supervisor insists on maximising the recycling of reusable waste, which he finds challenging due to his advanced age. The necessity will significantly boost his workload.

“公司叫我哋到時盡量要分類，真係要分類嘅話我就 *bye bye* (辭職) 㗎啦！如果有人手就最好分類啦，但我就得一個人，又要包垃圾，又要剝紙皮，又要洗垃圾桶，做唔嚟㗎，我已經70歲啦。”The cleaning staff employed at the garbage collecting facility in the wet market said.

c) Responsibility

In addition to the perception of the cleaning staff's current workload, we believed that the cleaning staff would be held accountable for the inconsiderate and self-centred acts of people prior to the site visit. Indeed, the cleaning staff are exempt from bearing the repercussions of the unlawful act of littering. Surveillance conducted by closed-circuit television (CCTV) is accessible at the waste collection points. They are certain that their companies will assume the additional cost for waste disposal in the event of any instances of littering. They are not accountable for reckless littering.

Simultaneously, the statement on citizens' knowledge of their duty in managing garbage is divided into two opposing views. The cleaning personnel employed in the park, coming from Sichuan, hold the belief that individuals in Hong Kong demonstrate a lack of tendency towards littering, as they showcase a heightened awareness and commitment to upholding environmental cleanliness. Nevertheless, a security guard employed in the park and residing in the public housing estate believes that certain individuals tend to trash, even in the absence of any consequences for their actions. He believed their inconsiderate action would intensify further following the adoption of the policy.

“依家都大把入喺上面 (大廈) 扔落嚟啦，好多時都中招㗎！依家唔使錢都扔，要畀錢咪更加大鑊？”
the security guard said.

Furthermore, during our visit to a public estate, we noticed that several individuals were engaging in reckless littering, namely with large-sized rubbish. It is evident that irresponsible littering existed even before the adoption of MSW charging.

d) Environmental Protection Awareness

In terms of environmental protection awareness for the public, we found that it remained as low as we thought. In interviews with the cleaning staff of Wu Yee Sun College, some of them claimed that “層層都有回收箱，每個禮拜都有人嚟清，但唔多人用”。This means that even though there were enough recycling facilities in the college, students still did not have a great interest in recycling. Moreover, the cleaning staff also mentioned that the students did not have correct concepts of recycling, in which many of them would put the wrong materials in the recycle boxes. As a result, the cleaning staff thought that it is even harder for the public to recycle, as “連啲大學生都唔識分類，出面啲人點識啊”。During the field trip to a public estate, we also found that it is a common story in Hong Kong. When we were investigating the

usage of the smart food waste bin, we saw a lady take a bag of food waste to the bin for recycling. We were pleased that the public was welcome and carried out actions for it. However, after she threw away the food waste, she just dumped the plastic bag that carried the food waste into a metal recycle bin right next to her. It is a sad story that some of the citizens might hope to recycle. But unfortunately, they do not have enough knowledge, so that they do it wrongly. We think that this implies that education in terms of recycling is far from enough in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, some of the cleaning staff thought that the MSW charge could help build up the habit of recycling. For example, the citizens might think twice before they consume as it would produce waste that costs. Also, under the recycling reward scheme, people might have a greater interest in recycling. We agree with that. We believe that recycling habits will be developed under the MSW charge. But it would be in the long run.

e) Promotion and Education (of the policy)

Before having interviews with the cleaning staff, we thought that there were many uncertainties and confusions about the scheme, and they proved our thoughts. Here are some comments that the staff said to us about the MSW charge: “一下子未必接受到，推行的太快，唯有邊做邊學啦”，“由細教育就啱㗎啦，但一時三刻咁一刀切，啲人邊做到嘅啫... 我哋做呢行就話要識，其他人邊會專心研究細節。” As a result, they all pointed out that the scheme is being implemented too fast. They do not have enough time to prepare for it, nor the public. Moreover, the education and explanation of the scheme is still not clear. As a result, the public could not be prepared for it. When it comes to the time that they have to classify the waste, there might be difficulties for them. At the end of the day, the cleaning staff would suffer the most as they are standing in the front line.

Meanwhile, we also found that it might cause greater concerns for non-local people. One of our interviewees comes from the mainland. He claims that he just knew about the name of the MSW charge, but he did not know its details. It is because “我不知道，我又聽不懂新聞，我們是來自四川的”。 From this conversation, we implied that non-Cantonese speakers are neglected. Yet even the locals still could not understand the scheme, nor did the non-locals. It is believed that it would be even harder for them.

f) Food Waste

In terms of food waste, we found it is insufficient. There are only around 170 food waste collection points in Hong Kong. It is far from enough if the government wants to promote food waste recycling in order to reduce the waste from the source. For example, there is only 1 Smart Food Waste Bin in the Southern District, in which around 270000 people live. With such proportion, how can the citizens use this “recycling facility”? It is ironic that the government is “promoting” such a thing. Nevertheless, we found that the food waste bin was hard to use. The citizens need to create an account with smartphone apps so that they can open the door of the machine and earn reward points. It would be great if the users were familiar with technological products. However, would it be a barrier for elderly citizens? It is believed that

the scheme would have a greater impact if the details were considered more carefully.

g) News

Furthermore, the media has reported extensively on introducing the MSW Charging Scheme, and discussions have intensified since the pilot scheme began. Most Hongkongers show resistance to the scheme, resulting in only 50% of citizens participating. Issues like the inconvenience of utilising recycling machines and remote collection points were reported and observed, which corresponds with our findings. Various council members also express their views regarding the MSW Charging Scheme. Miss Li believes the scheme is too idealistic and will lead to confusion (i-CABLE, 2024), while Mr Lo and Miss. Kong claims the scheme is “mission impossible” and proposed an indefinite postponement (HK01, 2024; RTHK, 2024). Yet, Chief Executive Lee asserts that the policy is already a law and emphasises the need to evaluate its effectiveness through trial periods before implementation (HK01, 2024). It is undeniable that this scheme has some shortcomings.

4. Recommendation

Based on the aforementioned, we have come up with some recommendations for the government and cleaning companies to minimise the impact on cleaning staff upon implementing MSW Charging.

a) The Government

Regarding the government, there are several recommendations they could consider.

Firstly, the government should provide detailed guidelines and practical manuals to ensure that cleaning staff are well-equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills. Training should be offered specifically for cleaning staff, instead of simply conducting workshops focusing on management staff as current practice.

Regarding the increased workload of cleaning staff, the 18 district’s Care Teams could play a crucial role in alleviating the problem. They could assist in educating the general public and the elderly about waste classification and the proper use of food waste processors. These teams could also offer door-to-door collection services for food and recycling waste to the needy and elderly, reducing the cleaning staff’s workload. Also, the government could design better quality designated rubbish bags to make waste disposal more convenient, alleviating the workload for the cleaning staff and the general public. In addition, the government should implement stricter laws and regulations to discourage illegal behaviour among the general public.

For environmental awareness, the government could increase the number of recycling facilities, including the traditional three-colour recycling bins, to encourage recycling in an environmentally friendly and green atmosphere in the community. Furthermore, more public education on correct recycling practices should be provided since Hongkongers are willing to be environmentally friendly, yet they need corresponding knowledge. Thus, education should be done in district centres, advertisements, and other means to target the general public.

Facilities should also have clear images and instructions, and recycling bins without lids could be used to avoid incorrect waste disposals.

Regarding the promotion and education of the scheme, the government should seek public opinion and understand the difficulties faced by different sectors before implementation. The current pilot scheme should be expanded to Hong Kong before full implementation or a gradual implementation could be considered. For instance, the first week's waste could be exempt from charges, allowing the general public to assess the amount of waste they generate and choose the rubbish bag based on their needs. Also, promotional and educational materials in Mandarin should be provided to accommodate non-Cantonese speakers.

For food waste recycling-related issues, the number of Smart Food Waste Recycling Bins could be increased. Using the machine and the app could be simplified since downloading an app and scanning a QR code might be challenging for the elderly and those with disabilities. Hence, the physical card option should be provided for accumulating points or using the food waste bins. The current app could also be enhanced to display the locations and availability of each smart bin, making it more convenient for users.

b) Cleaning Companies

Cleaning companies should train cleaning staff to ensure they understand waste classification and the proper handling of large waste. They could also post posters with instructions and guidelines in working areas, particularly during the scheme's initial stages, to serve as a reminder.

Regarding the workload, companies should ensure a clear labour division to ensure that no specific cleaning staff member bears all the increased workloads. For example, one worker could be responsible for waste classification, another for cleaning, and another for recycling; thus, a rotating schedule could be implemented.

Lastly, in terms of responsibility, companies can consider installing more CCTV in working areas to prevent cleaning staff from being blamed or bearing the responsibility for illegal waste disposal by the public.

5. Evaluation

This part is the evaluation of our performance on different research methods, including email consultations, interviews, and site visits. We aspire for this to contribute to better future project implementation.

a) Reflection on Email Consultation

Email consultation is a useful method as it allows us to reach higher-level individuals, including management. Those large-scale cleaning companies can provide information on companies' actions in response to the MSW charging policy, such as guidelines or training for frontline cleaners.

Unfortunately, as it needs time to respond as well as the absence of incentives for recipients to engage in the correspondence, we still have not received any reply. We can improve our consultation by trying a more direct approach such as visiting their offices.

c) Reflection on the Interviews

Interviews revealed positive outcomes, as we gained a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by frontline cleaners regarding MSW. Through live conversations, we obtained deeper insight as interviewees even shared novel ideas about them, which we had not considered previously. We are delighted that we could interview various cleaners working at different places, which provides us with more diverse insight.

However, the availability of cleaners for interviews posed a challenge as some were occupied with work or unwilling to participate. Conducting interviews proved to be time-consuming and logistically challenging, as coordinating a time when all team members were available for a few hours was difficult.

d) Reflection on Site-Visit

Site visits proved valuable in comprehending citizens' waste disposal habits and their living environment. We found that some citizens recycle indiscriminately and litter in residential areas. Those observation results are helpful for our report.

On the downside, limitations were identified in terms of sample size, as only a portion of citizens could be observed, making it difficult to generalise findings to the entire population.

e) Conclusion on Evaluation

To conclude our research methods, email consultation allowed access to management, but a lack of responses and incentives hindered engagement. Interviews provided comprehensive insights from diverse cleaners, yet availability and coordination posed challenges. Site visits revealed valuable observations on waste disposal habits, but the limited sample size affected generalizability. Each method has unique advantages and disadvantages, and we are delighted to have successfully gathered all we needed for our project.

6. Sharing

After completing our research, we have arrived at our own thoughts on the MSW policy. It is evident that a significant number of Hongkongers exhibit resistance towards the policy due to its confusing nature and the presence of various problems, including hasty implementation and insufficient guidance. However, it is important to acknowledge that the policy's core objective of waste reduction and recycling is commendable. Addressing these pressing environmental concerns is crucial for creating a better future. We sincerely hope that the government and relevant organisations can work towards improving the policy while encouraging all stakeholders to actively contribute to environmental protection efforts.

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8. Appendix

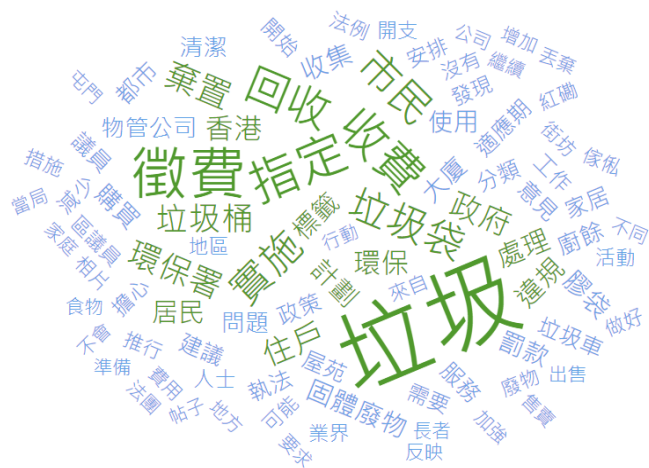


Figure 1: Word cloud showing that 'cleaning staff' receives less attention compared to other major stakeholders or wordings related to MSW charging policy. (HK01, 2024)



Figure 2: An image showing the littering problem in a residential area in Choi Hung

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are a group of students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Currently, our group is conducting research on the upcoming implementation of the Municipal Solid Waste Charging (MSW charging) policy, set to take effect [on 1 August 2024](#).

We are particularly interested in gathering insights from the managers responsible for managing the cleansing staffs in your esteemed company regarding their perspectives on this policy. It would be immensely valuable for us to understand your company's viewpoint on this matter.

Therefore, we would like to request your participation in an interview, where we can delve deeper into your experiences and gather valuable information. The interview can be conducted at a time and place convenient for you, and we estimate that it will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.

Thank you very much for considering our request. We are eagerly looking forward to the possibility of meeting with your company representatives and hearing your company valuable insights on the Municipal Solid Waste Charging policy.

Figure 3: The email interview invitation sent to cleaning companies

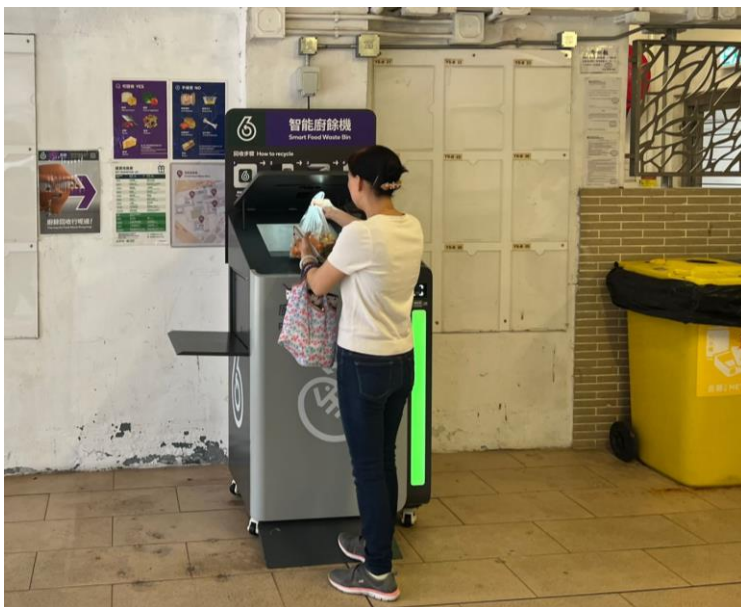


Figure 4: An image showing a resident using the smart food waste bin



Figure 5: An image taken when conducting site visits and interviews



Figure 6: An image of the waste disposal point at the residential area
(Banner: 嚴禁非法棄置廢物或雜物，違規人士可被檢控。如租戶須要使用此雜物站棄
署廢物或雜物，請預先致電27507211與屋邨辦事處聯絡。)



Figure 7: An image of the Smart Food Waste Bin
(Slightly complicated procedures and a smartphone app are required)