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**“Drink Cartons Recycling Cash Reward Programme” Formally Launched****\$0.05 per Carton to Subsidize the Upper, Middle and Lower Ends of Local Recycling Chain**

Environmental group **Green Power** has launched the “Drink Cartons Recycling Cash Reward Programme” with the support of the Recycling Fund. Frontline recycling workers (including waste pickers and cleaners) will be given \$0.05 per carton, which is equivalent to \$3.3 per kg. The cash reward also covers street corner recycling shops / recycling trucks and exporters, which will respectively receive \$0.02 and \$0.01 per carton. (For details please refer to Appendix 1: How the Cash Reward works). All the collected cartons will be sent to the only carton recycling factory, Mil Mill in Hong Kong. **Tommy Yu, Assistant Education and Project Manager** of Green Power, expected the scheme to bring benefit for the upper, middle and lower ends of the recycling chain in Hong Kong and provide a sustainable channel for new recyclables. The Recycling Fund has approved a total funding of \$2,790,000 for the scheme.

Yu remarked that the scheme makes the best use of the existing recycling chain in Hong Kong as compared to finding new subcontractors or building another recycling network. The upper, middle and lower ends of the existing recycling chain include (1) frontline recycling workers (such as waste pickers and cleaners); (2) street corner recycling shops / recycling trucks; and (3) exporters. Recyclables are now collected by frontline workers through a variety of channels and sent to recycling shops / trucks in the neighbourhood, which will then be transported to exporters after reaching a certain volume. Every exporter works with several recyclers to collect sufficient amount of recyclables for export. The different levels of parties take up different roles and complement each other throughout the recycling chain.

Yu pointed out that the percentage of cash reward disbursed follow the industry convention and can benefit different stakeholders. As the existing recycling network is long established and has a wide coverage in Hong Kong, the scheme can effectively increase recycling rate of drink cartons and reduce waste, creating an all-win situation for the recycling industry and the society as a whole. The scheme has received positive responses since the launching early this month.

### **Target to set up Producer Responsibility Scheme**

Yu emphasized that Producer Responsibility Scheme must be in place for the sustainable development of recycling work in Hong Kong. In particular, for low market value recyclables such as drink cartons with composite materials, experience in other countries shows that regulation on producer responsibility is essential for effective recycling. In 2018, the "Single-Use Beverage Packaging Working Group", set up by several beverage manufacturers, announced the expectation to recycle 70% to 90% of drink cartons and PET plastic bottles by 2025 the latest. The Drink Cartons Recycling Cash Reward Scheme aims to explore the sustainable model of Producer Responsibility Scheme for manufacturers and the recycling industry.

Yu stated that if the Drink Cartons Recycling Cash Reward Scheme is successful, it means that producers only need to provide \$0.08 per carton as monetary incentive while utilizing the present recycling network that basically covers the whole territory of Hong Kong. It will be quick and effective.

The scheme is now supported by three recyclable exporters, with five collection spots set up in the North East New Territories, North West New Territories, South West New Territories, Kowloon East and Hong Kong East respectively to collect drink cartons from recyclers across Hong Kong. 42 recyclers (shops and trucks) with about 380 frontline workers will participate in the scheme. Yu said that more recyclers will be recruited in future to reach the target of 100 recyclers.

### **Inviting catering industry and the public to participate**

#### **Recognition of the value of frontline recycling workers**

In the daily operation of the catering industry (such as restaurants and cafes), a large quantity of drink cartons— milk cartons, cream cartons, egg paste cartons, etc. is wasted. With the scheme in place, these cartons can be conveniently recycled. Yu said that the next step will be inviting the catering industry to join the scheme where matching between restaurants and frontline recycling workers in the same district will be carried out. The catering industry can give away the paper cartons for free to frontline workers while the workers can earn extra income by recycling the cartons.

In addition, Yu hoped that the scheme can give recognition to the frontline workers. Study by the Waste Picker Platform revealed that there are about 3,000 frontline recycling workers in Hong Kong, collecting a total of 200 tonnes of waste paper every day. This shows the significance of frontline workers to local recycling work. However, the workers are often neglected and there are little support for them in terms of policy. In the coming days, Green Power hopes to promote the concept of "clean recycling" among the catering industry and the public as well. A simple act of cleaning and drying the cartons before giving them to the frontline workers can help a lot and show our respect for them!

### **About Drink Cartons**

Paper carton is one of the most common waste generated in the catering industry and households. It ranks second (17%) <sup>[1]</sup> in packaging materials of the beverage market. Annually 24,500 tonnes <sup>[2]</sup> of waste cartons are dumped in the landfill, enough to cover the area of 3,698 Hong Kong Stadium.

Apart from beverage, drink cartons for broth, cream and corn etc. belong to the same category of waste. There are two major types of cartons: aluminium foil cartons and milk cartons. The former consists of paper, plastic, and aluminium; while the latter is made up of paper and plastic. All of these materials can be recycled. Paper cartons are recycled in many places worldwide, in Japan and Taiwan, for example, the recycling rates are 45% and 30% respectively.

<sup>[1]</sup> Drink Without Waste Research Report (2018)

<sup>[2]</sup> The latest Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong (2018)

### **About the Drink Cartons Recycling Cash Reward Scheme**

The scheme is conceptualized and managed by Green Power with the supported from the Recycling Fund - Industry Support Programme. The scheme is formally launched in July 2020 and targets to recycle 300 tonnes of drink cartons in a year. The full subsidy amount from the Recycling Fund is \$2,790,000. The scheme aims to provide cash reward to strengthen the existing recycling network (including frontline workers such as waste pickers and cleaners, street corner recycling shops/recycling trucks, and exporters). Innovation is instilled in the recycling industry by exploring



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new category of recyclables, expanding the scope of business and promoting development of Producer Responsibility. The scheme also organizes seminars for recycling industry, reports on “Effectiveness of the Recycling Industry Network” and “Producer Responsibility of Drink Carton Manufacturers”. The reports will be published for public scrutiny and is expected to benefit the recycling industry and the society in the long run.

Facebook page: Drink Carton Recycling <https://bit.ly/3fybM0h>

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