

## Press Release

# 2022 expected to be a difficult year for recycling

*Drink Without Waste published its 2021 Annual Report*

## Highlights 2021

- More than 260 million plastic bottles and 7 million liquid cartons were collected in 2021
- HK\$7.97 million expenditure in 2021
- Bulk collection of recyclables from cleaners is the key to success
- Calling on Government to change all water fountains to bottle refills stations

## Outlook 2022

- 2022 is expected to be a difficult year for recycling due to the pandemic
- Government to report outcome of public consultation on plastic beverage containers

**263.94 million used plastic beverage bottles and 7.13 million liquid cartons** were collected in 2021 with the support of the participants of the Single-Use Beverage Packaging Working Group. All plastics and cartons recovered are recycled into useful materials. The total expenditure was HK\$7.97 with over HK\$5 million sponsored by the Recycling Fund and the remainder by participants in the Working Group.

The *Single-Use Beverage Packaging Working Group* is a coalition of beverage manufacturers and importers, waste handlers and recyclers, institutions, retailers and NGOs in Hong Kong. The Working Group seeks to reduce the volume of used beverage packaging going to waste by 70 to 90%. Together they lead the *Drink Without Waste* campaign. For more information, please visit <https://drinkwithoutwaste.org/>

The *Single-Use Beverage Packaging Working Group* was formed in 2017 to campaign for a producer responsibility scheme for beverage containers. The theme of the campaign is *Drink Without Waste*. In 2021, government received overwhelming support for its plans to legislate such producer responsibility scheme during its 3-month consultation. Paul Zimmerman, who chairs the working group, said: "2021 was an important year for the *Drink Without Waste* campaign. **Given the support, we anticipate the legislation for a Producer Responsibility Scheme (PRS) to be in place by 2024.**"

A major undertaking in 2021 was the Neighbourhood Bottle Reward Pilot Scheme. Over 49 million used plastic bottles were recovered by rewarding cleaners 5 cents for each bottle returned. With a \$5.6 million budget from the Recycling Fund, the pilot scheme engaged over 1,000 cleaners and frontline collectors.

The scheme demonstrated that "**Small Material Recovery Facilities (SMRFs)**" are critical in sorting of **recyclables in bulk near residents and businesses**. A key objective for 2022 is to identify the estimated 20,000 SMRFs including areas in and near refuse rooms, as well as recycling shops, trucks and pop-ups. While most limit themselves to sorting paper and metal for recycling, it has been demonstrated that with the right incentives they are motivated to also handle plastics.

**A critical issue to resolve is space.** Cleaners and frontline recyclers who are able to collect high volumes of plastic bottles efficiently and at a low-cost need space. For more information, please read the [Submission to the Ombudsman on Illegal Occupation or Obstruction of Streets by Goods and Misc. Articles](#)

Separate from bulk collection, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) launched a pilot scheme with 60 return vending machines (RVMs) in government facilities for small volumes of used bottles. The RVMs offer a rebate of ten cents to encourage the public to participate in recycling plastic bottles. A second batch of 60 machines will be rolled out in the second quarter of 2022 bringing the total to 120.

**We continue to call on the Government to change all water fountains to bottle refills stations.** Packaging avoidance is key in reducing waste from beverage consumption. With our #drinkHKwater campaign we aim to build trust in the quality of Hong Kong's drinking water. We encourage people to bring their own bottles and use water dispensers. Our research has shown that thousands of government's water fountains are suspended due to hygiene concerns. However, with the Hospital Authority and the airport allowing bottle refill stations to operate, we encourage all government departments to convert their water fountains to bottle refill stations.

**2022 is expected to be a difficult year for recycling due to the pandemic.** Amid the fifth wave of Covid-19 in 2022, many liquid carton and plastic beverage bottle recycling activities were suspended. This is reducing recycling rates. The Department of Health discouraged recycling of plastic bottles distributed in quarantine facilities and hotels. There were 44 quarantine hotels in Hong Kong as of 26 March 2022. Assuming four bottles of water distributed daily to approximately 500 rooms in each hotel, 88,000 bottles are wasted per day.

Edwin Lau, founder and Executive Director of Green Earth, said: "Quarantine facilities dispose of large amounts of single-use plastic. The government and quarantine hotels should encourage quarantined residents to use water boilers. We should implement "closed-loop recycling" whereby plastics from quarantine facilities are delivered directly to recycling factories which use machines and do not require manual processing. This will eliminate the risk of infections. "

Harold Yip, Co-founder and Executive Director at SSID and Mil Mill, said he encourages the public to carry out clean recycling. By doing so, it can reduce work by recyclers and reduce the risk of infection. While recycling volumes remained stable in 2021, this is expected to drop in 2022. Harold remains optimistic in about recycling liquid cartons the long run.

As for the producer responsibility scheme (PRS), Edwin expressed disappointment with the delay in publishing the results from last year's public consultation on the PRS. He urged for the PRS to cover all beverage packaging, not just plastic bottles. He called on beverage manufacturers to take the initiative to set waste reduction and recycling targets during the policy gap before the implementation of the PRS.

Harold suggests liquid cartons should be included in the PRS. He noticed a trend whereby the packaging of water is shifting from bottles to liquid cartons. For example, while the Convention and Exhibition Centre has stopped selling bottled water, they have are now selling water in liquid cartons – which is equally damaging to the environment.

**Looking ahead**, *Drink Without Waste* will continue to build on our four strategies: Reduce, Redesign, Recover and Recycle. Our Working Group Participants will grow the capacity to recycle plastic bottles and liquid cartons. In addition, we will actively work with the Government and Legislative Council on the

Producer Responsibility Scheme (PRS). We will roll out new Subsidy Schemes to grow the recovery of the used beverage containers. The learnings of the Scheme will provide valuable information for the PRS.

In addition, *Drink Without Waste* will work with shopping malls and property management companies to promote the separation and recycling of used beverage containers. We will also continue to promote the installation of drinking fountains so that the general public can contribute to waste reduction and recycling.

*Drink Without Waste* aims to reduce single-use beverage packaging and to recover 70% - 90% used beverage packaging earliest by 2025. **Paul Zimmerman, General Manager** added: "Join the *Drink Without Waste*" campaign initiative and keep used beverage containers separate - at work and at home."

#### Speakers:

Paul Zimmerman, General Manager of Drink Without Waste Limited

Edwin Lau, Founder and Executive Director of the Green Earth

Harold Yip, Co-founder and Executive Director at SSID and Mil Mill

\*"Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material/ event do not reflect the views of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Advisory Committee on Recycling Fund or the Recycling Fund Secretariat."

#### References:

Drink Without Waste Annual Report: <https://drinkwithoutwaste.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Drink-Without-Waste-2021-Annual-Report.pdf>

Submission to the Ombudsman on Illegal Occupation or Obstruction of Streets by Goods and Misc. Articles <https://drinkwithoutwaste.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/DWW-Submission-to-Ombudsman-on-Illegal-Occupation-and-Obstruction-of-Streets-Sep-21-v1.3.pdf>

#### Zoom recording:

<https://fb.watch/ce8Sf8nyum/>

