

Taiwan Environmental Protection Administration Announcement

New EPA policies set to begin in January

The new year will usher in environmental policies that the government hopes will deal more efficiently with garbage nationwide and help track waste disposal vehicles to prevent illegal dumping.

The key measure announced this past week by the Environmental Protection Administration will be the extension of the garbage separation policy to all corners of Taiwan on January 1, 2006.

The program, requiring residents to sort their garbage into three categories -- ordinary garbage, recyclables and food scraps -- has been enforced in ten cities and counties since the beginning of 2005.

Garbage that is not properly separated will be rejected, and offenders will be fined between NT\$1,200 to NT\$6,000. Local EPA staffers will make random checks of garbage bags to ensure that residents are abiding by the new policy.

EPA officials noted that in the ten areas using garbage separation, the amount of garbage collected between January and October of this year declined by 10 percent compared to the same period last year, when the policy was not yet in effect. Thirty percent more recyclables and 65 percent more food scraps were collected under the new program during the same 2005 period than through more random collection efforts in 2004.

Besides extending the policy to all parts of the country, the EPA is also hoping to more efficiently recycle food scraps, which account for nearly one-quarter of all garbage collected. Burying them in landfills or incinerating create unnecessary burdens, the agency believes.

In landfills, the water that seeps from the scraps can potentially taint water management systems, while in incinerators, that same moisture hinders the burning facility from reaching its most efficient operating temperature, the EPA said.

Up to now, 75 percent of the food scraps recycled are used as pig feed, with the remainder turned into fertilizer.

With recent concerns over diseases spread through animals, however, the EPA, together with the Council of Agriculture, decided to restrict pig farm owners from using food scraps to feed their animals. Instead, most of the organic waste will be exploited as fertilizer, but to do so, factors such as land, the environment, quality, and product approach need to be further reviewed, the EPA said.

Members of the ROC Swine Association and several scholars objected to the proposal at a forum last week, asserting that food scraps were more expensive as fertilizers than their chemical rivals and, therefore, would not be commercially successful.

The association also complained that the policy reversal was unfair to pig owners because it would deprive its members of their most accessible feed source after they had cooperated with the government to consume a high percentage of the food scraps collected.

The EPA seemed ready to proceed with their new policy, however, despite the pig owners' objections.

In another new initiative, the EPA will try to improve the efficiency of garbage collection in rural areas. The agency is considering leaving one garbage truck in every area and adding recycling bins specifically for food scraps.

Another notable innovation by the EPA last week was adding a tracking mechanism for its online waste management declaration system. The improvement was designed to track waste collecting vehicles and keep a close eye on where the waste is disposed.

Combining the global positioning system with a mobile communication apparatus, system operators get thirty-second updates on the vehicles' latest positions. Over 1,300 waste collecting vehicles are currently equipped with GPS devices, and inspectors have PDAs that can track suspicious vehicles.

The EPA is also looking into a waste disposal logistics management tracking system, in which the vehicles would have barcode readers and a radio frequency identification device (RFID) installed. They would serve as an identification card, recording in the EPA database the time of each entry and exit of the vehicle into a disposal facility.

"Once these technologies are functioning appropriately, (the EPA) will promote it to other government departments and local businesses that would be helped by a tracking system like this," said Chen Hsiung-wen (陳雄文), director of the EPA's Waste Management Department.

The EPA hopes that by capitalizing on these technologies, the waste disposal process can be more transparent and lower the frequency of illegal dumping around the country.

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