

What is disposable plastic tableware?

Disposable plastic tableware refers to single-use catering utensils made of plastics. Common examples include various kinds of expanded polystyrene (EPS) tableware and other plastic straws, stirrers, forks, knives, spoons, cups, bowls, plates, etc.

Common disposable plastic tableware materials in Hong Kong are divided into two main groups, namely EPS and non-expanded polystyrene (non-EPS) (such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polypropylene (PP) and polystyrene (PS), etc.)



Disposable plastic tableware is relatively low-cost, heat-resistant and waterproof, and is widely used in our daily lives in recent decades.



Why do we need to regulate disposable plastic tableware?

Given the impacts of plastic waste on global marine ecology, human health, climate change and many other aspects, plastic waste has become an imminent problem worldwide.

Places around the world have been committed to discouraging the use of single-use plastic products, and gradually strengthening the regulation of disposable plastic tableware through legislation or various measures.

As a coastal city, Hong Kong has to pay extra attention to the problem of plastic pollution and adopt suitable measures to reduce the impacts of plastic waste on marine ecology and human health.

We have conducted a study on the feasibility, scope and mechanism of regulating disposable plastic tableware. The study report suggests introducing legislation to regulate various types of disposable plastic tableware commonly used by the catering sector with exclusions under individual special circumstances.



Other considerations

Difficulties in recycling

Due to its lightweight and bulky volume, EPS tableware has low recycling value, making it relatively difficult to recycle. EPS is light and fragile, rendering it easy to be carried into the ecosystem by wind and water if being disposed of wantonly, thus affecting the environment.

It is also very difficult to recycle for some tableware that is small in size (such as straws, stirrers, forks, knives, spoons).



Market for alternatives

The market for reusable tableware and greener non-plastic disposable tableware alternatives has developed rapidly in recent years, driving down the prices continuously to levels that are becoming more competitive as compared with those of conventional disposable plastic tableware.

What are the Choices for Alternatives?

The more common choices in the market are as follows:

Reusable tableware

- ✓ Metals
- ✓ Ceramics
- ✓ Glass
- ✓ Reusable plastics



Non-plastic disposable tableware

- ✓ Paper
- ✓ Bamboo
- ✓ Soft wood
- ✓ Aluminium foil
- ✓ Rice pulp
- ✓ Plant fibre materials
 - > Wood pulp
 - > Straw pulp
 - > Bagasse



As a matter of principle, we should reduce waste at source and avoid using disposable tableware. If the use of disposable tableware is unavoidable, more environmentally friendly tableware made of non-plastic materials should be used.

Scheme on Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware (the Regulation Scheme)

Disposable plastic tableware to be brought under regulation



Note:
It will cover disposable tableware made of all kinds of plastics, including "plastic substitutes" which claim to be degradable or biodegradable (e.g. oxo-degradable plastics and biodegradable plastics).

Proposed Regulation to be Implemented in Phases

One

Disposable EPS tableware:

- ⊘ Ban the **sale** of EPS tableware to local end-customers (including catering premises)
- ⊘ Ban the provision of EPS tableware by **catering premises** to customers for dine-in and takeaway services

Dine-in services

- ⊘ Ban the provision of all types of disposable plastic tableware by **catering premises** to customers for dine-in services

Takeaway services:

- ⊘ Ban the provision of straws, stirrers, cutlery (such as forks, knives, spoons) and plates by **catering premises** to customers for takeaway services

Two

Regulating takeaway services in the same manner as dine-in services

- ⊘ Ban the provision of all types of disposable plastic tableware by **catering premises** to customers

Note:

Catering premises: Any premises where a catering business is carried out by selling or supplying food or beverages to customers for immediate consumption within or outside the premises.

Regarding the catering services provided for some private events (including the provision of food & beverages and catering staff), as their nature is similar to that of dine-in services, it is also proposed that they should be included in the scope of dine-in services.

Timetable

Types of disposable plastic tableware	Phase One ¹	Phase Two ²
EPS tableware	Prohibits the sale to local end-customers (including catering premises)	Prohibits the provision by catering premises to customers for dine-in and takeaway services
	Prohibits the provision by catering premises to customers for dine-in and takeaway services	
Straws	Prohibits the provision by catering premises to customers for dine-in and takeaway services	Prohibits the provision by catering premises to customers for dine-in and takeaway services
Stirrers		
Cutlery (e.g. forks, knives, spoons)		
Plates		
Cups	Prohibits the provision by catering premises to customers for dine-in services	
Cup lids		
Food containers		
Food container covers		

Note:

¹ Subject to the views received and the ensuing legislative procedures, the first phase of the Regulation Scheme can be implemented in around 2025.

² Subject to the outcome of the first phase as well as the maturity of the market for alternatives in future, the launch date of the second phase will be reviewed and determined about 12 to 18 months upon the implementation of the first phase. It is also initially proposed to provide the second phase with a similar preparatory period.

Proposed Exclusions

- ⊘ **Disposable plastic straws** provided by catering premises on request by persons with special needs due to their medical needs or physical conditions.
- ⊘ **Disposable plastic tableware** that forms part of pre-packaged food products prepared outside catering premises.

Consultation Questions

Question 1

Do you support in principle the introduction of legislation to regulate disposable plastic tableware?

Question 2a

Do you agree that the Regulation Scheme should cover various types of disposable plastic tableware?

Question 2b

Do you agree that the Regulation Scheme should cover "plastic substitutes" (e.g. oxo-degradable plastics, biodegradable plastics, etc.) that claim to be degradable or biodegradable?

Question 3

Do you agree that the sale of disposable EPS tableware to local end-customers (including catering premises) should be banned?

Question 4

Do you agree that the Regulation Scheme should cover all catering premises?

Question 5

Do you agree that provision of disposable plastic tableware by catering premises to customers for dine-in services should be completely banned in the first place?

Question 6

Given that catering services provided for private events and dine-in services are similar in nature, do you agree that catering services provided for private events (including the provision of food & beverages and catering staff) should be included in the scope of dine-in services?

Question 7

Do you agree that a ban on the provision of disposable plastic tableware by catering premises to customers for takeaway services should be imposed in phases?

Question 8

What are your views on the timetable for implementing the Regulation Scheme in a progressive manner as proposed in the Regulation Scheme?

Question 9

Do you agree to the proposed exclusions?

Question 10

Do you have any other opinions on the "Scheme on Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware" and other relevant issues?

Share Your Views with Us

We invite you to submit your views online, or download the "Response Form" and submit it on or before 8 September 2021.

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Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware



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Disposable plastic tableware for a meal creates harm for hundreds of years