

SETW's speech at Hong Kong Construction Association (English only)

Following is the keynote speech (English only) by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works, Dr Sarah Liao at "Green Construction - We Must Do Better" organised by Hong Kong Construction Association at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre today (May 12) :

Good afternoon, President Conrad Wong, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Hong Kong Construction Association for the invitation to speak at this conference.

Green construction has been a topic of great interest in the local construction industry over the past few years. I am most delighted to learn that the industry is keen to join hands with the Government to further enhance our environment. No doubt, the construction industry plays a critical role in promoting green construction, especially at this time when we are faced with a daunting task to tackle the large amount of construction waste produced in Hong Kong.

Green construction is a key component of the wider concept of sustainable development, which will enable us to meet our present need without depriving future generations of opportunities to do the same. The Government has long been an advocate and driving force for green construction, in particular promotion of waste reduction at source. In this regard, we have issued a number of technical guidelines and circulars to further enhance waste management in public works projects. For example:

* Designers of public works are required to take solid steps to minimise the generation of construction and demolition (C&D) materials at source. The designs are also vetted independently to ensure every practical waste reduction measure has been considered, and the opportunity to reuse C&D materials is maximised.

* We have also amended the specifications to promote the wider use of recycled aggregates in government projects.

* Another measure is the adoption of the trip ticket system to ensure proper disposal of C&D materials from public works contracts.

We are now working closely with academic institutions to explore innovative ways to utilise different recycled materials, including recycled rubber, in construction works.

As a result of the above initiatives, I am pleased to note that the amount of construction waste disposed of at public fill reception facilities has decreased consistently over the last four years. For example, about 13 million tonnes of C&D materials were dumped at public fill reception facilities in 2002 compared with just 8 million tonnes in 2005, a drop of about 40%. Another achievement is the remarkable increase in the amount of C&D materials reused. Over the last four years, the amount of surplus rock from site formation contracts, which had been processed and reused as aggregates increased from just 0.04 million tonnes in 2002 to over 3 million tonnes in 2005. Also, an increasing amount of C&D materials generated from public works projects have been reused directly in construction works.

In the construction phase, we encourage contractors to adopt environmentally friendly materials and construction methods by awarding higher scores to their tenders. We recently introduced the "pay for environment scheme" in order to encourage contractors to better control the noise, smoke, dust and wastewater caused by construction processes. Contractors are also required to use ultra-low sulphur diesel. This will reduce the amount of sulphur dioxide emissions from their plants by over 90%. We also stipulate the contractual requirement for contractors to designate suitably qualified persons to oversee and monitor the implementation of environmental measures on site. These initiatives will no doubt help make the construction industry more environmentally friendly.

Energy conservation is an integral part of green construction. To reduce energy consumption in buildings, we have developed computer software to help the designer identify the most energy-efficient design in building projects. In addition, a number of energy-saving measures have been adopted in government buildings. For instance, the adoption of water-cooled air-conditioning systems instead of the conventional air-cooled air-conditioning would save up to about 20% of the electricity cost. Also, we have recently introduced further guidelines to promote the wider use of renewable energy in government projects, including the use of solar energy for water heating in buildings.

Tree preservation is another important element in green construction. Trees and plants not only minimise the visual impact of a structure, but also reduce carbon

dioxide and the greenhouse effect. Therefore, we are committed to preserving as many trees as possible in public works projects. We also maximise greening opportunities during the planning and development of public works projects through active planting. For instance, we planted 11 millions plants in 2005/06 and aim to provide another 9 million plants in 2006/07.

As you can see, the Government as the major purchaser of construction services has done a lot in promoting green practices. But government projects account only for about 25% of the construction activities. The other 75% is from the private sector, as well as other public corporations. Therefore, we strongly recommend that green design approaches be given a higher priority in private and public projects, starting from the early design stage. I am aware that this cannot be achieved without the full support of the management of the private sector and public corporations. Therefore, I appeal for your positive response and action to promote green designs in all your projects.

Today, I am very pleased to see the level of commitment from the construction industry seeking to "do better" in green construction. The next step is to put our commitment into action. The Government as the employer is more than ready to invest the necessary resources to raise and sustain the environmental quality of public works projects. I believe the industry is similarly ready to do likewise. So, let us work together to press forward towards a greener construction industry and create a better living environment for our next generation. Thank you!

Ends/Friday, May 12, 2006

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