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Wong Lok Hin’s dissertation: *The Effectiveness of Community Green Stations: a case study on the Sha Tin and the Eastern Community Green Stations* was jointly awarded the Fred Kan & Co. prize for 2016/2017 in the M. Sc. (Environmental Management) course at the University of Hong Kong. It is reviewed in this edition of UPELQ.

The Editors

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HOW EFFECTIVE ARE OUR COMMUNITY GREEN STATIONS?

Aim of the study

In 2015 the government established the Sha Tin and Eastern Community Green Stations (CGCs), and has adopted a programme to build a CGS in each of Hong Kong’s 18 districts.

The author’s abstract, in which the purpose and methodology of the dissertation are summarised, states: *“In order to relieve pressure on landfills and instill a green living culture into the community, the Hong Kong Government is now progressively developing Community Green Stations (CGSs) in each of the 18 districts. CGSs serve as a place to strengthen environmental education and facilitate the collection of recyclables at the district level. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of CGSs by conducting a case study on two established CGSs, the Sha Tin and the Eastern CGSs”.*

The author distributed questionnaires to visitors to the CSGs and local residents. These contained a series of questions concerning knowledge and opinion of the respective CSGs and, more widely, the respondents’ attitude to waste management issues, especially waste recycling. Replies were received from 50 visitors and 200 residents. The dissertation essentially comprises description and analysis of these responses, bolstered by the author’s own impressions gained from site visits.

CGSs’ role in our environmental programme

The Sha Tin CGS commenced operations in May 2015, and the Eastern CGS in September 2015. Additional CGSs were established in Kwun Tong and Yuen Long (January 2017) and Sham Shui Po (mid-2017). The remaining 13 CGSs are currently under development.

The author describes a CGS as: *“a place to strengthen environmental education and facilitate the collection of recyclables at the district level”.*

Expanding on this, the author notes: *“Low economic value recyclables including electrical appliances, computers, glass beverage bottles, compact fluorescent lamps and tubes and rechargeable batteries are of special interest. At the same time, the development of CGSs helps introduce the concept of MSW charging through public education activities and supports the producer responsibility schemes by assisting the collection of waste electrical and electronic equipment and glass beverage bottles. With the help of the corresponding District Councils, the Kwun Tong CGS and the Yuen Long CGS opened to public in January 2017 while the Sham Shui Po CGS is expected to start operating in mid-2017. The remaining 13 CGSs are in different construction and planning progress”.*

Thus, the two key roles of CGSs which the study focuses on are: facilitating Hong Kong’s embryonic waste recycling scheme (WRS) and educating communities on waste disposal responsibilities.

Sha Tin and Eastern CGSs are operated by the Po Leung Kuk. [The government intends placing the operation of all CGSs with not-for-profit organisations (NGOs).] They are both situated near MTR stations and are open from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The major functions of the station(s) are: “to promote environmental education by organising different kinds of activities and help collect recyclables in its service area”.

The CGSs facilitate the collection of recyclables as well as providing “logistics support” for the collection (of recyclables). They also have established mobile collection points at suitable public places, like housing estates and the exits of MTR stations. The author somewhat wistfully observes: “It is believed that green living can be incorporated into the Sha Tin community in the presence of the Sha Tin CGS”.

Objectives of the study

The author’s research for the dissertation had the simple, but very worthwhile, aim of determining “the effectiveness of CGSs by conducting a case study on (sic) the Sha Tin and the Eastern CGSs”. He lists the objectives of the study as:

- “ (1) To investigate the extent to which CGSs meet their objectives;
(2) To find out visitors’ knowledge about CGSs, their attitudes towards recycling and their recycling behaviour;
(3) To evaluate the popularity of CGSs at the community level;
(4) To provide feasible recommendations on improving the stations based on the findings from questionnaires and site visits;
(5) To explore the role and responsibilities of CGSs on environmental education and waste recycling in Hong Kong.”

Operations of the CGSs

As CGSs are community-based enterprises. The government’s policy is to appoint an experienced community – orientated NGO as operator of each CGS as they come on stream.

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) is responsible for monitoring the performance of each CGS operator, which is required to submit monthly performance reports to the EPD. Additional performance data are obtained via “stakeholder feedback”. Quarterly reports compiled by each CGS are available on-line to the public.

The CGSs provide waste separation and recycling facilities. Their other important function is to provide environmental education services, such as seminars, guided tours and workshops. In the second half of 2016, the Sha Tin CGS had approximately 19,000 visitors, whilst there were 74,000 visitors to the Eastern CGS.

Each CGS has built a network with housing estates and other interested organisations in the subject area. Today, the Sha Tin CGS covers 98% of its residential locality, whilst the Eastern CGS covers 87%.

By the first quarter of 2017, 217 and 194 waste collection points had been established by the Sha Tin and Eastern CGSs respectively. Each CGS had received approximately 100 tonnes of recyclables by early 2017.

In their education role, the CGSs are responsible for the following:

- “ • Offer environmentally related exhibits in CGSs
• Regularly organise environmental education activities on-site, at schools or at the housing estates (including guide tours, seminars, interest classes and workshops)
• Pay visits to schools and housing estates
• Promote the concept of “clean recycling” through environmental education programmes
• Help introduce the concept of MSW charging through public education activities”

The CGSs also have stalls which offer second hand books, clothes and other goods for visitors to purchase. This is a direct form of recycling managed by the NGO operators.

Factors influencing effectiveness of CGSs

The author discusses several factors which, it is argued, have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of a CGS in discharging its recycling and education roles. These are:

- (1) the general level of the community’s “pro-environmental behavior” and “environmental knowledge”;
- (2) accessibility and convenience of the recycling programme run by the CGS, e.g. the convenience of the waste collection sites;
- (3) the extent of publicity given by “mass media” to the operations of the CGSs and their positive role in addressing Hong Kong’s severe waste disposal problem.

It is noted that the hugely important factor of “environmental knowledge/education” is being addressed (to a limited extent) by various government programmes, such as environmental education in schools (commenced in 1992) and various “territory – wide environmental programmes to various sectors of the community, such as exhibitions, carnivals and campaign activities” organised regularly by the EPD.

Permanent environmental education facilities have also been established; e.g. the Environmental Resources Centres and the Green Education and Resources Centre.

As an integral part of its environmental education programme, the government “is progressively developing CGSs”. Unfortunately, at present in Hong Kong “there is a lack of pro-environmental behavior” which is demonstrated by low levels of recycling of municipal waste.

Waste disposal is a major environmental problem

It is well known that Hong Kong has a serious waste disposal problem. For example, in 2015 5.51 million tonnes of waste were dumped in our three landfills, which will run out of space by 2020. The government has targeted a 40% per capita reduction of waste by 2022 by increasing waste recycling and introducing waste-to-energy technologies.

The government’s waste management policy follows the European Union’s *Waste Framework Directive* (1975), which sets out a hierarchy of principles in descending order of priority, namely:

- prevention (i.e. use less)
- re-use

- recycle
- recovery (e.g. convert to energy)
- disposal (landfill)

The author suggests the government has initiated substantial waste reduction schemes and regulations, and has more in the pipeline. Examples are: the Environmental Levy on Plastic Bags Scheme; Producer Responsibility Schemes; the WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment disposal scheme) and the proposed Municipal Solid Waste Charging Scheme (which, will not come into effect until the second half of 2019, in keeping with the government's lethargic approach to implementing any scheme to reduce our environmental footprint).

Several factors operate against a quick and robust waste disposal solution in Hong Kong, including:

- public distrust of the “*credibility of the waste separation and collection systems*”;
- lack of comprehensive and convenient waste collection system which “*diminishes the effort people are willing to make*”; and
- the high cost of establishing and operating an efficient WRS and local recycling industry.

The author sees the role of CGSs in promoting waste recycling as involving the following functions:

- *Establish both residential and organization collection points for low-valued recyclables*
- *Offer logistical support in the collection of recyclables*
- *Set up mobile collection points at suitable public places (e.g. housing estates and the exits of MTR stations)*
- *Provide recycling facilities in CGSs*
- *Support the PRSs by assisting the collection of WEEE and glass beverage bottles*
- *Promote the concept of “clean recycling” through environmental education programmes*

Public attitude – questionnaire results

A substantial part of the dissertation deals with the contents of, and responses to, a questionnaire the author distributed to visitors and stakeholders. An impressive array of tables and pie-charts have been included. Time does not permit analysis of these, and we shall limit our review of this part of the study by noting several of the conclusions drawn from the responses:

- 97% (Shatin) agree that it is important to nurture a habit of recycling; 100% in Eastern
- in Shatin, 93% would take an active role in recycling; 95% in Eastern
- 95% (Shatin) would “*take advantage of recycling programmes available to me*”; 95% in Eastern
- to the question “*I am responsible to turn waste into resources by carrying out recycling*”, 89% (Shatin) and, 91% (Easter) agree

In both Shatin and Eastern, the substantial majority of visitor respondents “*had a habit of recycling*” – and used the CGS regularly. However, less than 50% of the residents who responded were aware the CGSs existed.

Responses and statistics led the author to conclude that both Sha Tin and Eastern CGSs “*performed well in terms of recyclable collection service*”. The author comments that the CGSs could improve their educational role by, for example, devoting more of their considerable space to environmental educational exhibitions.

Conclusions and recommendations

The author suggests a number of actions to improve the performance of CGSs in recycling and environmental education and Hong Kong's recycling scheme generally, such as:

- enrich the content of exhibits
- add more environmental facilities
- include English versions of CGSs publicity and educational materials
- place recycling facilities in prominent positions (“*eye-catching areas*”)
- expand the recyclable collection service to cover more categories of waste
- give increased public prominence to CGS information notices (etc)
- organise more environmentally related activities outside the sites
- increase publicity through mass media
- expand the coverage of P2S to other waste
- establish a recycling fund supported by the responsible waste-generating industries

The author's summarised conclusion is set out below:

“CGS is a community-based project that plays an important role in promoting green living at the district level. The effectiveness of the Sha Tin and the Eastern CGSs are examined in this study. Despite the fact that the two CGSs have been collecting an increasing amount of recyclables during the operational period, there is much room for improvement for them to enhance their environmental education service and recyclable collection service. Besides, the lack of publicity of CGSs deserves our attention. Step up publicity and promotion efforts is of vital importance to let more people learn about the stations. Especially, more activities should be organized outside the CGSs to serve members of the public living further away from the stations. To tie in with the implementation of Government's further policies, CGSs are responsible to help introduce the concept of MSW charging through public education activities and support the PRSs by assisting the collection of WEEE and glass beverage bottles. Only with the concerted effort of the Government and the operators can the above-mentioned goals be achieved.”

TOWN PLANNING

Draft Siu Ho Wan Outline Zoning Plan gazetted

The Town Planning Board announced the publication of the draft Siu Ho Wan Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) on 29 March 2018. The OZP is intended to reserve land for Government, Institution and Community facilities and supporting infrastructure.

The planning scheme area covers 186 hectares, stretching from Sham Shui Kok in the northeast to Tai Ho Interchange in the southwest.

Specific zones are:

- 15.54 hectares are zoned “Government, Institution or Community” to provide land for GIC facilities serving the needs of the local residents and/or a wider district, region or the territory.
- 63.6 hectares are zoned “Other Specified Uses”, including “Railway Depot and Public Transport Interchange with Commercial/Residential Development”, “Water Treatment Works”, “Sewage Treatment Works”, “Organic Resources Recovery Centre”, “Refuse Transfer Station”, “Columbarium” and “Pumping Station and Associated Facilities”
- 68.04 hectares are zoned “Green Belt” to provide passive recreational outlets.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 29/03/2018]

The Peak Area Draft Outline Zoning Plan approved

The Chief Executive in Council approved the draft The Peak Area Outline Zoning Plan (“OZP”) on 6 April 2018.

The planning scheme area covers about 900 hectares in the Peak area. The OZP is intended to provide a statutory land use planning framework guiding the development and the redevelopment of the Peak area.

Specific Zones are:

- 0.5 hectares are zoned “Commercial”, whereby (a) the sites at the southern end of Guildford Road and at 100 Peak Road are designated as “C(1)” and “C(3)” zones respectively and (b) the site at 128 Peak Road, also known as the Peak Tower, is designated as “C(2)” zone;
- 8.2 hectares are zoned “Residential (Group B)” for medium-density residential developments;
- 8.26 hectares are zoned “Residential (Group C)” for low-rise, low-density residential developments;
- 14.5 hectares are zoned “Government, Institution or Community”;
- 12.1 hectares are zoned “Open Space”, which include existing parks, playgrounds and scenic vantage points.
- 1.8 hectares of land are zoned “Other Specified Uses”
- 227 hectares are zoned “Green Belt, covering undeveloped hill slopes in the area.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 06/04/2018]

The Kai Tak Draft Outline Zoning Plan approved

The Chief Executive in Council approved the draft Kai Tak Outline Zoning Plan (“OZP”) on 25 May 2018.

The planning scheme area covers about 323 hectares in the Kai Tak area. According to the OZP, the Kai Tak site is proposed to be developed as the “Heritage, Green, Sports and Tourism Hub of Hong Kong”. Covered areas include North Apron Area, South Apron Area and Runway Area of the ex-Kai Tak Airport site, a Tau Kok waterfront, Kwun Tong waterfront, Cha Kwo Ling waterfront, Kai Tak Approach Channel, To Kwa Wan Typhoon Shelter and Kwun Tong Typhoon Shelter.

Specific Zones are:

- 41.91 hectares have been reserved for residential developments, within which seven sites are zoned “Residential (Group A)” and 26 sites are zoned “Residential (Group B)”;
- 16.22 hectares are zoned “Commercial”, which include 13 sites located in Kai Tak City, the South Apron Area and the Runway Area;
- 9.62 hectares are zoned “Comprehensive Development Area”, which include three sites in Lung Tsun Stone Bridge Preservation Corridor, two sites adjacent to Kai Tak River and one site at Ma Tau Kok waterfront;
- 37 hectares are zoned “Government, Institution or Community”;
- 98.18 hectares are zoned “Open Space” covering the Sung Wong Toi Park, Heritage Park, Metro Park, Runway Park, open spaces near the Station Square and Kai Tak Sports Park and other district/local open spaces as well as the waterfront promenades;
- 53.81 hectares are zoned “Other Specified Uses” which include the cruise terminal, Kai Tak Sports Park, railway station with commercial facilities, waterfront and tourism related uses, heliport, and landscaped elevated walkways.
- 66.46 hectares are reserved for major roads and other uses.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 25/05/2018]

WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

The 70th Board Meeting of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority

The Board of the WKCDA held its 70th meeting on 27 March 2018.

Mr. Pescod, the Chief Executive Officer of the WKCDA, reported that the Xiqu Centre was 75% through the statutory inspections. He expected the Occupation Permit would be issued in April.

He also reported that the promenade area of the Art Park has been opened to the public. Construction of the integrated basement of the Lyric Theatre Complex are 6 weeks ahead of schedule.

The 71st Board Meeting of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority

The Board of the WKCDA held its 71st meeting on 20 April 2018.

The Chief Executive Officer of the WKCDA, reported that the statutory inspections of the Xiqu Centre have been completed and that the Buildings Authority has issued the Occupation Permit for the Xiqu Centre.

The M+ construction works continues at a steady pace, and construction of the Lyric Theatre remains ahead of schedule.

The WKCDA has also begun planning development of the hotel, office, residential portion of the West Kowloon District. An exhibition to introduce both Art, Commerce and Exhibitions and the artist hotel/residence was held at China Hong Kong City from 21 to 23 April 2018.

The 72nd Board Meeting of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority

The Board of the WKCD held its 72nd meeting on 29 May 2018.

The Chief Executive Officer of the WKCD, reported the opening of the Ground Breaking Ceremony for the Hong Kong Palace Museum and the commencement of the construction for this new museum on 28 May 2018. He also expected that the fit-out of the Grand Theatre of the Xiqu Centre will be completed in the third quarter of 2018.

Members noted that the revised design of Artist Square Bridge has been presented to the Legislative Council Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project. It is expected that a funding application will be submitted to the Public Works Subcommittee and the Finance Committee by end of 2018.

HONG KONG BRIEFING

Drill curbs set for airport pipeline

The Airport Authority confirmed that the installation of the new 5.2-kilometre pipeline at the airport does not require any drilling into the seabed and will have virtually no impact on the environment. The installed pipelines will be used for transferring fuel from the Tuen Mun aviation fuel facility to the fuel tank at the airport.

According to Tommy Leung King-yin, the Authority's Deputy Director for the third runway project, the pipes were installed by a horizontal directional drilling technique, which was deployed through the rock zones 100 metres below the seabed. To date, it is the longest pipeline installation in the world to use that drilling technique. Given that the existing pipelines were only 10 metres below the seabed, they might not have been able to withstand pressure from the reclamation work for the third runway.

The Authority has adopted environmental protection measures to minimise the project's impact on the ecosystem. In particular, the construction area was set away from the egret on Sha Chau all works on the island were suspended between April and July because it was the breeding season of the egrets.

Moreover, in order to minimise disruption to the surrounding area, the Authority limited the drilling range to 100 square metres and constructed containment pits around the drilling hole to prevent pollutants leaking into the birds' habitat. Levels of noise, air and water pollution during the construction process were strictly monitored.

Leung added that egrets and dolphins were seen even when the construction process was ongoing, showing (he said)that it barely had an impact on the animals.

The new pipelines were installed to replace the existing section between Sha Chau and Airport Island, which needed to be replaced as part of it was under the reclamation site for the third runway. However, it is reassuring to note that even after the new pipelines begin operation, the old ones will remain in their current position as removing them would require another construction project and may harm the ecosystem. The Authority will simply clean the interior of the old pipelines and seal the ends.

The HK\$141 billion third runway is set to be completed in 2022 and fully in use in 2024.

[*The Standard*, 20/04/2018]

Floating solar panels to be installed at reservoirs

The Water Services Department is looking into installing floating solar panels at various reservoirs.

Development chief Michael Wong Wai-lun noted that pilot schemes have been under way at Shek Pik and Plover Cove reservoirs, where 352 panels have been installed. The solar system in Plover Cove has been operating for six months, while the one at Shek Pik has been in existence for over 12 months. Those panels can generate enough electricity for 36 households.

According to Wong, the panels at Plover Cove were installed in the shape of a ship, and it became a new place of interest for people to visit and take photographs.

Secretary for the Environment Wong Kam-sing noted that introducing solar panels at reservoirs can slow climate change as well as protect water resources by reducing the evaporation of water and controlling the growth of algae.

Leung Chi-fung, an assistant electrical engineer with the Water Supplies Department, said installing solar panels on a water surface has a natural cooling effect on the devices and enhances their efficiency in generating electricity. At the same time, panels on the reservoirs help reduce water evaporation.

The two solar systems will generate electricity in helping department facilities nearby and are expected to produce 120,000 units of electricity every year - equivalent to planting 420 trees or reducing carbon emissions by 84 tonnes.

The panels at each reservoir measure 1,100 square metres. They are to be made of a glass that does not reflect sunlight and does not disturb wildlife.

[*The Standard*, 07/05/2018]

Water quality at Shek O beach improves

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced on 14 June 2018 that the Environmental Protection Department has classified the water quality at Shek O Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island as Grade 2, which means the water quality has improved and the beach is suitable for swimming.

The red flag was hoisted at the beach earlier due to the water quality being classified as Grade 4 and unsuitable for swimming.

[*HK SAR Government Press Releases*, 14/06/2018]

CLIMATE CHANGE

New Zealand bans new offshore oil exploration

New Zealand is halting all new offshore oil and gas exploration. Currently, New Zealand has granted 31 oil and gas exploration permits, with 22 of them offshore.

According to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, the main reason behind halting all new offshore oil and gas exploration is to address climate change and create a clean, green and sustainable future for New Zealand. The oil and gas industry is an important industry in New Zealand, as it generates about NZ\$2.5 billion (US\$1.85 billion) per year, including NZ\$1.5 billion in exports, and employs about 11,000 people.

To minimise the adverse effect on the livelihood of employees working in the oil and gas industry, existing drilling and exploration permits will not be affected. Ardern also revealed that the limited new onshore permits will be granted around the North Island's Taranaki region, where most of New Zealand industry is concentrated. The moratorium on new licences underscored the fact that climate change was real and New Zealand needed to be at the forefront of efforts to address it, she added.

Prime Minister Ardern also said that New Zealand has been a world leader on various critical issues, such as being a nuclear-free nation and being the first country to support women to vote. The next goal of New Zealand is to become a world leader in becoming carbon neutral.

Environmental groups welcomed the move. Greenpeace said that "the tide has turned irreversibly against big oil in New Zealand." "This is a huge step forward for New Zealand and a landmark moment in the transition to a clean-energy economy," WWF New Zealand head Livia Esterhazy said.

[*Taipei Times*, 13/04/2018]

Second hottest year on record slowed California's smog progress

A recent report published by the American Lung Association, *State of the Air 2018*, shows that California has the worst air quality in the U.S. This year's report reveals that California's ozone levels rose significantly due to some of the warmest temperatures on record in 2016. Extreme heat and other climate-driven events have a direct impact on the state's air quality.

State of the Air 2018 also recorded that 90 percent of Californians live in areas with unhealthy air at some point during the year. California's most populous metro area, Los Angeles, led the nation for ozone pollution, faring worse than it did in the 2017 report. The San Joaquin Valley dominated the list of most polluted for short-term and year-round particle pollution; Visalia, Bakersfield and Fresno all landed in the top five.

Rising temperatures linked to climate change hinder the fight against ozone pollution (also known as smog). Eight cities increased their unhealthy ozone averages: Los Angeles-Long Beach (and Inland Empire), Bakersfield, Visalia, Sacramento, San Diego, Redding-Red Bluff, the San Francisco Bay Area (including Stockton) and Chico.

[*PR Newswire*, 18/04/2018]

Electric buses drive on and upwards

Electric buses were seen as a joke at an industry conference in Belgium seven years ago when BYD showed an early model. Now, suddenly buses with battery-powered motors are a serious matter and have the potential to revolutionise city transport, as well as adding to the forces reshaping the energy industry.

The numbers are staggering. China had about 99 per cent of the 385,000 electric buses on the roads worldwide last year, accounting for 17 per cent of the country's fleet. Every five weeks, Chinese cities add 9,500 zero-emissions buses – the equivalent of London's entire working fleet.

For every 1,000 battery-powered buses on the road, about 500 barrels a day of diesel fuel are displaced from the market. This year, the volume of fuel buses take off the market may rise 37 per cent to 279,999 barrels a day.

China is ahead on electrifying its fleet because it has the world's worst pollution problem. With an increasing urban population and soaring energy demand, the country's legendary smogs were responsible for 1.6 million extra deaths in 2015, according to Berkeley Earth.

A decade ago, Shenzhen was a typical booming mainland city that had given little thought to the environment. Its smog became so notorious that the government picked it for a pilot programme for energy conservation and zero-emissions vehicles in 2009. Two years later, the first electric buses rolled off BYD's production line there. And in December last year, all of Shenzhen's 16,359 buses were electric.

BYD had 13 per cent of the country's electric bus market in 2016; 14,000 of its vehicles in Shenzhen alone. It has built 35,000 electric buses so far and has capacity to build 15,000 a year.

BYD estimates its buses have logged 17 billion kilometres and saved 6.8 billion litres of fuel since they started service in the world's busiest cities. That adds up to 18 million tonnes of carbon dioxide pollution avoided, which is about as much as 3.8 million cars produce in each year.

Other cities are taking notice. Paris, London, Mexico City and Los Angeles are among 13 cities that have committed to operating only zero-emissions transport by 2025.

London is slowly transforming its fleet. Four routes in the city centre are being changed to electricity. There are plans to make significant investments to clean its public transport networks, including retrofitting 5,000 diesel buses to ensure all are emission-free by 2037.

Those goals will have an impact on fuel consumption. London's network uses about 1.5 million barrels of fuel each year. If the entire fleet goes electric, that will displace 430 barrels a day of diesel for each 1,000 electric buses, reducing Britain's diesel consumption by about 0.7 per cent.

[*SCMP*, 25/04/2018]

Increase in wind-energy capacity

Global wind-energy capacity could increase by 56 per cent to 840 gigawatts by the end of 2022, as costs continue to fall and the market returns to growth, a report by the Global Wind Energy Council shows.

The council said cumulative wind-energy capacity stood at 539GW at the end of last year, 11 per cent higher than in 2016. China continues to be the world's biggest wind market, adding nearly 19.7GW of new capacity last year, though this was 15.9 per cent lower than in 2016.

[SCMP, 26/04/2018]

Oil companies should pay for climate damage

Five major oil companies for years deliberately sought to downplay and discredit scientific warnings about the risks of global warming, alleges a lawsuit filed by King County, Seattle, Washington State, U.S.A.

The Superior Court lawsuit names BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Exxon Mobil and Royal Dutch Shell as defendants, and seeks financial compensation to help pay for the costs of coping with sea-level rise, extreme weather and other effects of climate change.

The lawsuit claims the oil companies intentionally produced and marketed massive quantities of fossil fuels that they knew will exacerbate global warming, and alleges that this conduct amounts to "a continuing trespass onto county property."

As of earlier this week, nine other cities and counties have sued fossil-fuel companies over climate change, according to InsideClimate News. That news service, along with the Los Angeles Times, in 2015 published articles detailing how Exxon's researchers, decades ago, understood the science and risks of climate change driven by fossil-fuel combustion: These reports have helped set the stage for the current crop of lawsuits. Proponents of the new lawsuits say that, if successful, they could impose major new costs on the fossil-fuel industry.

Exxon has mounted an aggressive strategy to counter climate-change lawsuits.

Bloomberg in February reported that Exxon targeted at least 30 people and organizations with lawsuits, threats of lawsuits or demands for sworn depositions. "The company claims the lawyers, public officials and environmental activists are 'conspiring' against it in a coordinated legal and public relations campaign," Bloomberg reported.

The court battles over climate change come amid a political divide in the United States over how government should respond. President Donald Trump has repeatedly brushed off the threats posed by climate change, and announced that the U.S. will withdraw from the Paris climate accord that seeks to limit global temperature warming. Meanwhile, he has sought to ramp up U.S. coal, natural gas and production. In Washington state, many politicians have embraced the science of climate change and sought to reduce fossil-fuel consumption.

The King County lawsuit lists county damage that will result from climate change. They include landscaping costs due to drought, as well as salmon protection, flood control, bridge work to keep the structures safe due to increased stream flows and road repair.

[The Seattle Times, 10/05/2018]

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

CHINA

New campaign against trash smuggling

As part of China's latest move to tackle the inflow of foreign rubbish and strengthen its war on pollution, China's customs administrations announced on its Weibo social media feed its new campaign against trash smuggling from overseas.

Last year, China told the World Trade Organisation that it would stop accepting imports of 24 types of foreign waste by the end of the year.

Since then, 259 people have been arrested for smuggling foreign waste through various means, including taking containers of electronic waste from Hong Kong to North Korea and then smuggling them across the border into China.

As of early April this year, Customs had seized 110,000 tonnes of smuggled solid waste and arrested 52 people.

[SCMP, 22/05/2018]

Major Chinese river starts to run dry

The Songhua River, which flows through the centre of one of the largest cities in northeast China, has fallen to its lowest level in 11 years. Many sections of the riverbed have dried up and boats that carry tourists to Sun Island in the middle of the river last week suspended their operations because of the low water levels.

[SCMP, 28/05/2018]

THAILAND

'New dumping ground' for world's e-waste

Police and environmentalists noted that Thailand became a new dumping ground for electronic waste, after China's prohibition on imports of electronic waste last year.

On 29 May 2018, Bangkok police seized seven shipping containers each loaded with approximately 22 tonnes of discarded electronics. Bangkok's Deputy Police Chief said that the incident showed that the world's electronic waste is flowing into China. According to Thai law, anyone found guilty of smuggling e-waste could be jailed for up to 10 years.

[Reuters, 30/05/2018]

NEPAL

Some relief for Phewa Lake

Phewa Lake conservationists have welcomed Nepal's Supreme Court's order for the immediate removal of buildings and business infrastructure illegally constructed on the banks of the famous lake in the Pokhara Valley.

The ruling of the Supreme Court has set down the lake's area at 2,874 ropanis (6.5 sq km approx.) and directed the authorities concerned to remove all structures built within the lake's boundaries.

The Court refers to recommendations made in a report prepared by a commission led by Bishwa Prakash Lamichhane, former chair of City Development Commission of Pokhara, which was submitted to the government in May 2012. The Commission's report at that time recorded that 86 hectares of land around Phewa Lake had been converted into personal properties by illegal means, and recommended that the government terminate the illegal occupation. However, the recommendations in the report were not implemented.

The Supreme Court's ruling is expected to offer the authorities a much-needed impetus to act towards reclaiming the encroached land. The Court order favouring the Commission's report has been well received by Pokhara residents, who have long been advocating for stronger Phewa Lake conservation. "We expect the authorities to act on the order without any delay," said Sundar Kumar Shrestha, a tourism entrepreneur.

Phewa Lake is a major tourist attraction of Pokhara. Over the years its size has shrunk significantly. Several resorts and restaurants have cropped up along the lakefront, despite the buildings being banned within 65 metres from the lake's edge.

The report of the Lamichhane Commission lists the names of over 1,000 individuals who have illegally acquired properties within the lake's immediate surrounds. These landowners include businesspersons and government officials.

According to a report prepared by the Phewa Lake Conservation and Management Office (FLCMO) two years ago, there are as many as 204 illegal structures within the lake's boundaries. FLCMO engineer Mahendra Godar said the lake encroachment and illegal construction of buildings have still not stopped. "We do not know the exact number of houses and huts that stand on the lake's property. Such is the pace of construction here," he said. "The size of Phewa Lake was already shrinking due to natural causes; now we have human activities to contend with."

Geologists say Phewa Lake is shrinking every year, mainly due to silt deposited by approximately 50 rivulets that feed into the lake. In 1957, the lake covered an area of approximately 10 sq km; by 2007 its area had shrunk to a mere 4 sq km.

[Kathmandu Post, 01/05/2018]

KENYA

Court stops port project

In a stunning win for communities in Lamu, Kenya, the government has been ordered to pay more than \$17 million USD to 4,600 fishermen for damages caused by an enormous infrastructure project: the Lamu Port, South Sudan, Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET).

The High Court found that "if the LAPSSET Project is implemented in the manner projected now, it runs the risk of irreversibly violating the various components of the right to culture of the Petitioners and other indigenous residents of Lamu County."

Lawyers at the Katiba Institute brought the case on behalf of residents of Lamu. In a Summary of Findings and Orders issued by the court, the High Court declared that the project proponents "failed to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) before embarking on the individual components of the LAPSSET Project as they were duty-bound to do."

The Court also declared that "project proponents of projects which are likely to have significant environmental, social, cultural and other impacts are required...to consider and assess external costs of the projects, policies, plans and programmes associated with proposed projects as part of the ESIA and SEA Processes."

The Court remanded the EIA Licence to the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) for reconsideration (although the court stopped short of invalidating it during the review). Additionally, the Court found violations of a right to information and the need for effective public participation.

Finally, the Court ordered the government to "draw up a Management Plan to preserve Lamu Island as a UNESCO World Heritage Site." The Court required project proponents to report back to the Court on progress implementing the judgment.

ELAW Staff Attorneys and Scientists collaborated with Katiba Institute, Natural Justice, and Save Lamu to ensure the port project does not devastate coastal communities, mangroves, coral reefs, and sea turtle habitat.

The massive port project is being built in Lamu, a UN World Heritage Site and Kenya's first Swahili settlement. The 32-berth cargo and container port would service what would be East Africa's first coal-fired power plant, and export oil and other natural resources from East Africa.

Last year, ELAW Staff Scientist Mark Cherniak and Ernie Niemi, an economist from Natural Resource Economics, Inc., traveled to Kenya and provided expert testimony at hearings at the Malindi High Court. Ernie's testimony focused on the need to study the external costs of the project, a key focus of the court's decision.

ELAW has provided partners with critical support, including a comprehensive review of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and environmental and social impact assessments (ESIA) for the first three berths of the port. ELAW also provided partners with strategic research on environmental issues as well as resources for community workshops to help residents understand what a deepwater port looks like when completed.

[*ELAW Press Release*, 03/05/2018]

CANADA

Pipeline project divides Canada

A pipeline project that would vastly expand Canadian oil exports to Asia is dividing the country, pitting indigenous groups and people who fear damage to the scenic coastline near Vancouver against the central government and the influential energy industry.

The Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion would triple the capacity of an existing pipeline to ship oil extracted from the inky black tar sands north of Alberta across the snow-capped peaks of the Canadian Rockies. It would end at a terminal outside Vancouver, resulting in a seven-fold increase in the number of tankers in an environmentally sensitive area dependent on tourism and fishing.

"It just boggles my mind that people are willing to risk Vancouver to a catastrophic oil spill," said Stewart Phillip, the grand chief of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, which represents 115 aboriginal groups that oppose the expansion.

Many indigenous people see the 620 miles of new pipeline as a threat to their land, echoing concerns raised by Native Americans about the Keystone XL project in the U.S. Many in Canada say it also raises broader environmental concerns by enabling increased development of the carbon-heavy tar sands.

The project has strong support in a country where energy production has become a key part of the economy. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government approved the expansion, arguing that it was "economically necessary" and enabled him to overcome opposition to a carbon tax plan that will help Canada cut its greenhouse emissions.

Facing legal challenges filed by the government of British Columbia, the company that would build the pipeline, U.S.-based Kinder Morgan Inc., halted essential spending on the project last month and said it would cancel it altogether if Ottawa and British Columbia could not ensure they would be able to go forward.

The project has pitted Alberta against coastal British Columbia, where concerns about fisheries, real estate values, tourism and ocean ecology are high. Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson calls the pipeline an "unacceptable risk" that threatens 10,000 jobs in the harbor.

The Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion is projected to lead to a tanker traffic balloon from about 60 to more than 400 vessels annually as the pipeline flow increases from 300,000 to 890,000 barrels per day.

Critics dislike the whole concept of the oil sands because extracting the oil requires huge amounts of energy and water, increases greenhouse gas emissions by 10 percent in Canada and threatens oceans and rivers with spills and forests with massive open pit mines.

[*The Oregonian*, 13/05/2018]

U.S.A.

California mandates solar power for new homes

Long a leader and trendsetter in its clean-energy goals, California has become the first state to require all new homes to have solar power. The requirement, to take effect in two years, brings solar power into the mainstream in a way it has never been until now. It will add thousands of dollars to the cost of a home when a shortage of affordable housing is one of California's most pressing issues.

That made the relative ease of its approval – in a unanimous vote by the five-member California Energy Commission before a standing-room crowd, with little debate – all the more remarkable.

State officials and clean-energy advocates say the extra cost to homebuyers will be more than made up for in lower energy bills. That prospect has won over even the construction industry, which has embraced solar capability as a selling point.

Several California cities have required that some new buildings include solar power or have made commitments to 100 percent clean energy through various sources. But California's move is by far the boldest and most consequential.

California law requires at least 50 percent of the state's electricity to come from non-carbon-producing sources by 2030. Solar power has increasingly become a driver in the growth of the state's alternative energy production.

And a new rate structure next year will charge California customers based on the time of day they use electricity. So homeowners with energy efficiency features – battery in particular, allowing energy to be stored for when it is most efficiently used – will avoid higher costs.

At the end of 2017, California was by far the nation's leader in installed solar capacity. Solar power provides almost 16 percent of the state's electricity, and the industry employs more than 86,000 people.

Under the new requirements, builders must take one of two steps: make individual homes available with solar panels or build a shared solar-power system serving a group of homes. In the case of rooftop panels, they can either be owned outright and rolled into the home price, or be made available for lease on a monthly basis. The requirement is expected to add \$8,000 to \$12,000 to the cost of a home.

For residential homeowners, based on a 30-year mortgage, the Energy Commission estimates that the standards will add about \$40 to an average monthly payment but save consumers \$80 on monthly heating, cooling and lighting bills.

[*The Seattle Times*, 10/05/2018]

Banning Plastic Straws in New York City

Democratic City Councilman Rafael Espinal introduced a bill on 30 May 2018, proposing to ban plastic straws and stirrers in bars, restaurants and coffee shop in New York.

Under his proposal, restaurants should replace plastic straws with paper or metal straws, and the penalty for using plastic straws would be a \$100 fine.

Mr. Espinal noted that 500 million plastic straws are discarded each day in the U.S. and up to 12 million metric tons of plastic end up in the oceans each year.

[*Associated Press*, 23/05/2018]

EUROPE

EU proposes total ban on certain throwaway plastic products

In order to reduce the harmful impact of plastics, EU proposes to ban throwaway plastic products.. The proposal covers 10 single-use plastic products commonly found on Europe's beaches and seas. These single-use items include: plastic cotton buds, cutlery, plates, straws, drink stirrers and sticks for balloons

The targeted items amount to 70 % of the rubbish found in the continent's waters and on Europe's beaches.

The proposal also sets out how individual EU member states will have to meet targets for reducing single-use plastics by 2025. It is hoped that the proposal be implemented within 12 months.

[*Independent*, 28/05/2018]

SCOTLAND

Plastic coffee cups banned in Scottish government offices

In order to reduce the harmful impact of plastic pollution, the Scottish government plans to ban single-use coffee cups in Scottish government buildings. It is expected that the prohibition would prevent 450,000 plastic cups from being thrown away each year.

The prohibition was proposed as a support to the EU's vision to reduce single-use plastics as far as possible by 2030.

[*Independent*, 30/05/2018]

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Convictions under environmental legislation: April to May 2018 (June 2018 data not available)

[Note: the EPD no longer classifies second (and subsequent) offences.]

The EPD's summary of convictions recorded and fines imposed during the above period is as follows:

April 2018

Ninety-one convictions were recorded in April 2018 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Sixteen of the convictions were under the *Air Pollution Control Ordinance*, 13 were under the *Noise Control Ordinance*, 61 were under the *Waste Disposal Ordinance*, and one was under the *Water Pollution Control Ordinance*.

The heaviest fine in April was \$60,000, assessed against a company which imported controlled waste without a permit.

May 2018

Sixty-four convictions were recorded in May 2018 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Five of the convictions were under the *Air Pollution Control Ordinance*, 1 was under the *Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance*, 15 were under the *Noise Control Ordinance*, 39 were under the *Waste Disposal Ordinance*, and 4 were under the *Water Pollution Control Ordinance*.

The heaviest fine in May was \$40,000, assessed against a company which discharged waste/polluting matter into the water control zone.