

Hong Kong sticks a fork in disposable plastic products

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Hong Kong's legislature on Wednesday passed a bill banning restaurants from providing plastic utensils beginning on Earth Day, April 22, 2024.

Need a plastic fork at a Hong Kong restaurant? Come April 22, Earth Day, customers will have to start reaching for more eco-friendly cutlery,

according to a bill passed Wednesday by the city's legislature.

Plastic waste is the finance hub's second-largest source of [municipal solid waste](#), with the average amount disposed a day totaling 2,331 metric tons in 2021—a weight equivalent to nearly 70 adult humpback whales.

The city on Wednesday passed amendments to a "Product Eco-Responsibility Bill", implementing a blanket ban on the sale and provision of various plastic products—with the first phase taking effect on Earth Day, April 22, 2024.

That means in 28,000 eateries across the city, "expanded polystyrene (EPS) tableware and other disposable plastic tableware that are small in size and difficult to recycle" will be prohibited for dine-in and takeaway services, said a government announcement.

Serving up soup in a [plastic container](#) is also a no-no, though using it for take-out is still allowed—until phase two kicks in.

The government said phase two's start would "depend on the availability and affordability of the relevant non-plastic or reusable alternatives".

Freebies in Hong Kong's hotels and airlines will also look very different—plastic bottles of water or toiletries like plastic-handled toothbrushes, as well as disposable ear plugs, will also be banned.

Shops selling glow sticks, party hats, cake toppers and cotton buds will also be taking a hit.

Any violations could result in a fine of between HK\$2,000 to HK\$100,000 (\$250 to \$12,800).

During the session, legislator Peter Koon fretted over the inconvenience eliminating these [plastic](#) items would cause as well as the extra costs for local residents and tourists.

"I had the experience of buying takeaway hot soup from a shop that had adopted paper containers, but when I got home, the container had broken and the soup had run out," Koon said.

"In a society where Chinese cuisine is predominant, I urge authorities to be more careful or it may result in the opposite of what we wish."

The real work of the bill will begin post-passage, said legislator Michael Tien.

"How to introduce the alternative choices to the public, how to support the industries—this will be a very heavy and important responsibility for the (Environment and Ecology) Bureau."

Welcoming the news, Greenpeace campaigner Leanne Tam said Hong Kong has been discussing this issue for "about a decade".

"Hong Kong is now catching up with other cities in the region in terms of reducing [plastic waste](#)."

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