

Could this sort out Edinburgh's rubbish?

While in Taiwan over this last week I was invited to the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) of the Executive Yuan, where our group met the Deputy Minister Hung-The Tsai.

He told us about the novel way they have encouraged recycling and proper waste management in Taiwan, by initiating the 'trash never touches the ground' system since the late 1990s.



Deputy Minister Hung-Teh Tsai presenting one of our group José Vadillo Vila from El Puerano based in Lima with a commemorative gift of persimmons made from recycled materials.

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It is important that you know that I did not see any rubbish on the streets of Taipei, the capital, where 2.4 million people live. There are no unsightly communal waste bins. Now I know why.

In this unique set-up, the residents of the city are alerted to the arrival of the rubbish truck at the nearby collection point by the tune it plays – either Beethoven's Für Elise or the Polish composition, Maiden's Prayer. (And there is a small recycling truck right behind it.) The trucks play Christmas tunes in December and other traditional tunes at Chinese New Year. In Tainan, the vehicles teach English by playing conversations rather than belting out the usual tunes. "How are you?" they ask, followed by a short conversation.

Using government certified colour-coded bags which you can buy in convenience stores for your landfill, you take your own rubbish to the collection truck, ensuring that it does not touch the ground on the way.

Raw food waste is processed into fertiliser, and cooked food waste is made into food for livestock. In addition, residents are encouraged to take their own rubbish home with them. There are few bins anywhere – and certainly not on public streets.

Recycling is encouraged as it is free, but a payment has to be made for any rubbish sent to landfill. So using the polluters pay philosophy, everyone is encouraged to throw away less. Taiwan is also taking steps towards banning single use plastics such as straws and plastic bags, encouraging electric scooters, solar panels and now offshore wind with the Formosa 1 Offshore Wind Farm which began producing energy commercially just three years ago.

We watched an informational film which narrated : "High population density, rapid economic growth, industrial and commercial activities have led to a heavy environmental load

and deteriorating quality of life.”

To improve that quality of life the EPA was established in 1987 with a vision of blue skies and green earth, verdant mountains and pristine water. The government says it expects all citizens to take care of their environment. There is a relatively small staff of 943 at the EPA with a budget of \$750million last year to help achieve this.

The amount of waste collected from each home has dropped by around a third from 1998, and recycling has reached nearly 60%. More than 97% of non-recycled waste is converted into refuse-derived fuel.

Could we sort Edinburgh's rubbish problem with this simple idea? No rubbish touches the ground in Taiwan. Each resident is responsible for taking their own trash out – and in some areas it is collected twice a day... Any suggestions for a suitable tune in the capital? pic.twitter.com/xZ2t4bqtiY

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 13, 2020](#)

And before you say this would never work in the Scottish capital – the small trucks collect rubbish twice daily in some areas. Is that not better than twice monthly? Oh and then there is the community element. For those who cannot take their trash out their neighbours are there to help. These friendliest of peoples are only too happy to help, by hand delivering their garbage straight on to the small truck.

And anyone who fails to comply with the rules can expect a fine of several hundred pounds.

So what do you think? And which tune would encourage you to take your rubbish out?

With thanks to Lucy for filming for us at her rubbish

collection point in New Taipei City.