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Go for Plastic-Free Countryside

Disposable plastic waste is a serious issue. Statistics from Euromonitor International shows that globally 480 billion of plastic-bottled beverages and 500 billion plastic bags are consumed every year. Most disposable plastic waste ends up as garbage, and “Plastic-free” becomes top agenda all over the globe. “Clean Up the World”, organized by the United Nations and joined by over 130 cities around the world including Hong Kong, also highlighted “plastic pollution” as its theme this year. “Green Power”, a Hong Kong-based environmental organisation, takes the lead for the regional campaign. This year, the group has created the slogan “Love Hong Kong’s Countryside, Say No to Disposable Plastic Wares” to advocate the abandon of disposable plastic wares during their visits to the countryside.

The 26th “**Clean Up the World in Hong Kong**”, organized by **Green Power** and sponsored by **Hong Kong Electric**, took place at **Wan Chai Gap Park** today. Results of “Hong Kong Countryside Rubbish Survey”⁽¹⁾ for the new year were also announced.

A total of 555 questionnaires were successfully collected from the online survey, conducted in September 2018. The survey discovers that over 70% of respondents generate plastic waste during their visits to the countryside, averaging 2.2 pieces per person each time. Respondents generally understand the impact of plastic waste on the nature, including long decomposition time, ingestion by wild animals, breakdown of waste into micro-plastics that enter the food chain and etc. In regards to the reduction of plastic waste, over 90% of respondents support other mitigation measures. “Stop using plastic wares at countryside kiosks” and “suspend the sales of plastic bottled beverages in countryside” are supported by 70% and 80% of respondents respectively. “Install additional water fountains in countryside” and “suspend the sales of bottled water in countryside” are supported by nearly 60% of respondents.

According to Mr. **Henry LUI, Senior Conservation Manager of Green Power**, the survey shows that the public are generally aware of the impact of plastic waste in countryside and needs to take corresponding measures. Since the installation of water fountains requires other ancillary facilities, it is rather difficult to implement in the short term. On the contrary, suspending sales of plastic-bottled water and beverages, as well as prohibiting kiosks from distributing disposable tableware are relatively easy to enforce. He recommended the authority to actively consider these suggestions.

The survey also identifies people's tendency towards creating and handling garbage in countryside. Identical to the survey results in the past 2 years, napkins, food packaging and plastic bags top the amount of garbage items created by countryside visitors, which account for 76%, 72% and 53% respectively. On average, every countryside visitor generates 1 to 2 pieces of each type of those garbage items per visit. In addition, **Mr. Henry LUI** noticed that although lots of respondents had acquired the habit of bringing their garbage away from the countryside, over 50% of respondents still disposed of their garbage in the rubbish bins or recycling bins in the countryside. He reminded the public that garbage in bins could still be blown away by gusts. Wild animals could forage for food in the bins. So the best way is to discard their garbage in urban area.

Mr. Henry LUI pointed out that by the end of 2017 the authority had removed all rubbish bins and recycling bins along hiking trails in country parks, to which the public responded positively. Compared to last year's survey, the numbers of supporters have a rising trend. Approximately 50%, 45% and 75% of respondents supported the removal of bins in camp sites, barbeque sites or picnic sites respectively. The support ratios have increased by 16%, 13% and 7% compared to last year. He recommended that, for the next step, the authority could try to remove rubbish bins and recycling bins in some picnic sites to encourage more people to practice "take your litter home".

Moreover, most respondents still considered coastal litter a serious problem, with waste at barbeque/picnic sites ranking second. These results were similar to past 2 years' results.

Guests who attended the activity today included **Mr. TSE Chin-wan, Under Secretary for the Environment from the Environment Bureau**; **Mr. YEE Tak Chow, General Manager (Corporate Development) of HK Electric**; and **Dr. CHENG Luk-ki, Director of Green Power**.

"The government is highly concerned about the environmental impacts of plastic waste in the countryside", said **Mr. TSE**. "In order to draw more attention to the issue, The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department has launched a series of 'Let's Go Plastic Free' activities, educating the general public on reducing the use of plasticware. To further engage public participation, the Environmental Protection Department has also promoted the 'Plastic Free Beach, Tableware First' campaign. Moreover, practical measures addressing the issue have also been raised by the latest Policy Address. We sincerely hope that the public will understand more about the environmental threats posed by the plastic waste. Let's join the plastic-free force together!"

Mr. YEE Tak Chow said, “HK Electric has supported the ‘Clean Up the World in Hong Kong’ campaign for 24 years, and are glad to continue supporting this meaningful campaign and help promote ‘plastic-free’ countryside environment”.

Aiming at reducing the top three disposable plastic wares while picnicking, namely food packaging (e.g. plastic sandwich boxes, plastic bags), disposable tableware and plastic-bottled beverages, the organizer introduced “Three Countryside Plastic-Free Treasures”. They were food containers, reusable tableware and reusable water bottles that allow you to carry home-made food and beverages in place of disposable plastic wares aforementioned. The HK Electric Volunteers also cleaned up the trash on the hiking trails at the Aberdeen Country Park, promoting the “Three Countryside Plastic-Free Treasures” to the country park visitors and encouraging them to go “plastic-free” together.

⁽¹⁾ *“Hong Kong Countryside Rubbish Survey” has been conducted as online questionnaires yearly since 2016. This year the survey was conducted between 14th and 26th of September, 2018. The subjects had visited the countryside during the past year and were at least 16 years old.*