

7 October 2006

## **People wasting less at Mid-Autumn Festival Concern with Mooncake Disposal Remains**

About one hundred Hongkong Electric volunteers took part this morning in cleaning up a barbecue site at Aberdeen Country Park where people celebrated the Mid-Autumn Festival last night.

The action was part of the “Clean Up the World in Hong Kong” campaign – now in its 14<sup>th</sup> year – organised by the environmental group, Green Power.

Green Power says that while people are wasting less at festivals these days, the government and mooncake manufacturers can do more to help them reduce wastage further.

The green group sent questionnaires recently to 400 people who had taken part in a similar survey in 2004 on Hong Kong people’s consumption and celebration habits during Mid-Autumn festivals.

The answers showed people were now paying more attention to the need to protect the environment while celebrating the festival and to perform environmentally friendly practices such as recycling empty mooncake boxes, re-using plastic lanterns and avoiding buying more food than is needed.

But the study found a lack of green packaging for mooncakes and pointed out that brand name mooncakes, popular as gifts, are often packaged too elaborately adding to Hong Kong’s waste disposal problem.

The findings were announced at this morning’s “Clean Up the World in Hong Kong” drive, attended by Ms Anissa Wong, Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Environment); Dr. Tso Che Wah, General Manager (Projects) of Hongkong Electric; Mrs Rita Fan, President of the Legislative Council; Ms Audrey Eu, Member of the Legislative Council, and Ms Julie Chater, Deputy Consul-General of the Australian Consulate-General.

Dr. Tso said, “This is already the 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive year for Hongkong Electric to support this worldwide activity as we fully share its objectives of reminding the public to keep the environment clean and to waste less during festivals.” He said a “Greener Festivals” website has been set up to provide tips on minimizing festival waste and protecting the environment.

The waste collected at this morning's clean-up comprised 2.75 kg of paper, 1kg of aluminium cans, 3.75 kg of plastic bottles and 33.4 kg of other refuse. The volume represents an increase/ decrease of 20% over that of last year.

"I hope local citizens can keep our country parks clean and above all, reduce waste at source," said Ms Anissa Wong. Mrs Rita Fan and Ms Audrey Eu, who are regular participants at the annual clean-up drives, said that the activity had drawn public attention to the importance of keeping Hong Kong clean; yet it would be more meaningful if the community could understand the significance of reducing waste at source and regard it as the ultimate goal. They expressed the hope that there would soon be no need for clean-up activities.

Chief Executive Officer of Green Power, Dr. Man Chi Sum, called on mooncake manufacturers to package their products in a more eco-friendly way. He pointed out that Taiwan introduced a "limitation of over-packaged products" law in July this year, reducing the average package size by 36 per cent. He urged the government and the Legislative Council to pass a "Product Eco-responsibility Bill", making manufacturers accountable for their products.

"Eco-friendly packaging could help manufacturers increase sales and improve their company image as green corporate citizens, while encouraging consumers to reduce waste," said Dr. Man. He also recommended that gift boxes should contain fewer mooncakes to avoid wastage.

Major findings of the "Mid-Autumn Festival Consumption and Celebration Habits" survey include:

- ◆ A fall of about ten percentage points in discarded empty mooncake boxes this year compared with 2004, and a welcome 20 percentage point jump in boxes handed in for recycling.
- ◆ Thirty-six per cent of respondents bought mooncakes with simpler packaging, representing a near-10 percentage-point improvement over 2004.
- ◆ Regarding plastic lanterns, the average number of lanterns bought by households dropped from 1.2 in 2004 to 0.7 in 2006, while the average number of lanterns discarded by households fell from 0.8 in 2004 to 0.5 in 2006, indicating that more families are keeping and re-using the lanterns.

- ◆ Each family discarded 0.8 and 0.9 mooncake in 2004 and 2006 respectively, showing there is still room for reducing wastage. In both surveys, about 20 per cent of respondents said they discarded the mooncakes because the consumption date had expired, while about 15 per cent said they discarded their mooncakes because they had turned bad.
- ◆ Compared to 2004, the volume of food left over from the Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations fell by 20 percentage points this year, indicating that except for mooncakes, people did not buy more than was needed for the occasion.

Since 2004, Green Power and Hongkong Electric have been actively encouraging people through their annual “Clean Up the World in Hong Kong” campaign to reduce waste by showing them how to do it and to make occasions such as the Mid-Autumn Festival greener and more environmentally friendly.

- End -