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5 Steps at Source to Achieve Mid-Autumn Zero Food Waste

Environmental group Green Power today released the results of the latest survey on “Consumption and Celebration Habits during Mid-Autumn Festival”. This found that there has been some improvement in the problem of Mid-Autumn food waste in Hong Kong. Yet it remains a serious issue, and Green Power appeals for people to waste less food during the Mid-Autumn Festival, in turn relieving the heavy pressure on landfills.

Throughout the year, food waste accounts for a third of all Hong Kong’s Municipal Solid Waste, with over 3,500 tonnes being dumped in landfills every day. The problem is exacerbated during the Mid-Autumn Festival, because of discarded mooncakes and excess food from family reunion dinners.

Today, **Green Power** released the results of the latest survey on “Consumption and Celebration Habits during Mid-Autumn Festival”. The survey found that the situations of discarded mooncakes and excess food from Mid-Autumn Festival family reunion dinners have shown improvement. For example, the number of discarded mooncakes has dipped to a record low since the survey began, and the number of families having leftovers during reunion dinner has also shown a slight decrease compared with last year. However, results show that respondents’ families still threw away an average of 0.75 mooncakes. Plus, over 60% of respondents’ families produced significant amounts of other food waste during last year’s Mid-Autumn Festival. Disappointingly, only slightly more than half of the respondents’ families expressed willingness to practice comprehensive domestic food waste recycling, while more than 20% of the families indicated uncertainty in how to separate domestic food waste for recycling.

Mr Henry Lui, Conservation Manager of Green Power, is very pleased to see that the number of discarded mooncakes has dipped to a record low since the survey began in 2004. “However, due to the large demand for and sales of mooncakes, even if each family only throws a small amount away, huge numbers are still discarded,” he added. “We hope people can more accurately estimate the number of mooncakes needed, so they don’t buy too many.”

Also, some of the snowy mooncakes have short expiry periods, so **Mr Lui** advised people buying gifts to instead choose longer lasting mooncakes, or dried foods such as mushrooms and scallops. “Also, if people want to show respect to elderly people, simply providing warm company and enjoying the full moon with them may be a better and greener option than giving them gifts,” suggested **Mr Lui**.

Last year, more than 60% of respondents had leftovers from their Mid-Autumn Festival reunion dinners, representing an 8% decrease compared to 2011. Meat was the main leftover, followed by rice and noodles, and vegetables. **Mr Lui** suggested that people prepare less meat and more vegetables for such dinners. Not only will this help reduce food waste, but it is also healthier and more environmentally friendly. Also, as around 15% of respondents went to buffets or other all-you-can-eat dinners last year, **Mr Lui** urged people to avoid choosing buffets for reunion dinners. This is because all-you-can-eat dining is extremely wasteful, with research showing that hotels have to prepare 30% more food for buffets than for typical dining.

Mr Lui was sympathetic regarding survey respondents being uncertain how to recycle food waste. “Dishes in Chinese cuisine tend to contain a lot of sauce and oil, making them relatively hard to handle as leftovers,” he said. “Plus, among the respondents who are unwilling to separate food waste, 60% of them are because of hygiene issues. The government must take such concerns into account if it wishes to encourage people to practice food waste recycling.”

The survey also found that 40% of the respondents’ families think reducing commercial food waste is the key to tackling Hong Kong’s food waste problem, while just 26% of them acknowledge the need to reduce domestic food waste. This prompted **Mr Lui** to remind people that two-thirds of Hong Kong’s food waste is from households, making action at home essential. “Although the government is now building an organic resources recycling center, it will not be in operation until 2015 at the earliest, and will treat a mere 15% of Hong Kong’s food waste,” he said. “So it’s vital to reduce food waste at its source.”

The survey results were released today during the 21st “Clean Up the World in Hong Kong” event, organized by **Green Power** for the 18th consecutive year, with sponsorship from **Power Assets Holdings Limited**. Officiating guests were: **Mrs Regina Leung, Wife of the Chief Executive**; **Ms Anissa Wong Sean-ye, JP, Director of Environmental Protection Department**; Teachers and students from **Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road)**; **Mr Yee Tak-chow, HK Electric General Manager (Corporate Development)**, and **Dr Eric Tsang Po Keung, Chairman of Green Power**.

With the Mid-Autumn Festival approaching, the organizers also launched the “5 Steps at Source to Achieve Mid-Autumn Zero Food Waste” commitment to action, to encourage Mid-Autumn food waste reduction among the public. Ceremony guests shared their tips on how to reduce Mid-Autumn food waste at source.

Mrs Regina Leung, wife of the Chief Executive, suggested people use all parts of the ingredients efficiently. “The skin of many root vegetables and fruits is perfectly edible after being washed,” she said. “Indeed, scientific research shows that the skin of many root vegetables and fruit has more antioxidants than the flesh. So as well as reducing food waste, eating vegetables or fruit with skin is good for health.”

Mr Yee Tak-chow, HK Electric General Manager (Corporate Development) advised people to avoid buffets during Mid-Autumn family reunions. “Although buffets are more popular and affordable, they encourage food waste so should be avoided,” he said. “Remember that the point of a reunion dinner is to enjoy the company of your family. Food is not the priority. It is best to enjoy our reunion dinner whilst reducing food waste.”

Ms Anissa Wong Sean-ye, JP, Director of the Environmental Protection Department, suggested that people should carefully plan orders for reunion dinners. No one should order too much for reasons like “face”.

Dr Eric Tsang Po Keung, Chairman of Green Power, also suggested that people calculate the numbers of mooncakes they need before purchasing. “They might try and remember how many mooncakes they needed in the past, to make better estimates this year – which will also save them money,” he said.

A group of teachers and students from **Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road)** also attended today’s event, to share their experience of reducing food waste in school. Teacher **Miss Wong Wing-sze** said their school has been practicing on-site meal portioning for years, leading to a dramatic reduction in food waste. The school has even been equipped with a food waste disposer to facilitate food waste collection in school. **Heather Kwan**, P.5 Food Waste Ambassador, explained her duty in school: “I was responsible for collecting food waste in P.1 and P.2. After this experience, I keep reminding myself not to waste any food. I also remind my fellow students not to waste food – I’m so happy to see that there are less and less leftovers!”

After the ceremony, a group of volunteers from Power Assets joined over 40 students from **Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road)** on the busy streets in Causeway Bay to call for food waste reduction. They also explained the problem of Mid-Autumn food waste to passers-by, and encouraged them to commit to practicing “5 Steps at Source to Achieve Mid-Autumn Zero Food Waste”.

“5 Steps at Source to Achieve Mid-Autumn Zero Food Waste”

“5 Steps at Source to Achieve Mid-Autumn Zero Food Waste” commitment to action officially starts today. It provides citizens with 5 simple and easy to implement tips for achieving zero food waste during the Mid-Autumn Festival. From purchasing festive food including mooncakes, to preparing reunion dinners and cooking ideas, the tips aim to reduce waste at source and so relieve the pressure on landfills. People who make an online commitment to the “5 Steps at Source to Achieve Mid-Autumn Zero Food Waste” will have an opportunity to obtain a free set of food bag sealing clips.

“5 Steps at Source to Achieve Mid-Autumn Zero Food Waste” commitment to action:
www.greenpower.org.hk/cuw (The website also provides green tips for various festivals)

“Clean Up the World”

“Clean Up the World” is an international activity organized by the United Nations. This annual event is now held in more than 130 cities around the globe, with more than 35 million people participating, and Green Power is the official organizer in Hong Kong. Since 2004, the theme has been “Reducing Festival Waste and Enjoying Greener Festivals”, encouraging the public to minimise waste and harm to the environment and the Earth while celebrating a greener festival. A “Greener Festivals” website has been established to provide information and tips on festival waste reduction. (Website: www.greenpower.org.hk/cuw)

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