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70% Say No to Mooncakes; Upward Trend of Glow Sticks Disposal

Green Power Urges for a Less Wastage Mid-Autumn Festival

The 23rd “Clean Up the World in Hong Kong”, organised by Green Power and supported by HK Electric, was held today at Pier 8, at Central Pier. Participating guests included **Mr. LIU Ming Kwong, Vincent, JP**, Acting Director of Environmental Protection; **Mr. YEE Tak-Chow**, General Manager (Corporate Development), HK Electric and **Dr. Eric TSANG Po Keung**, Chairman of Green Power. After the ceremony, a number of volunteers from HK Electric and students from SKH Holy Cross Primary School took part in an appeal action.

Mr. LIU Ming Kwong, Vincent, JP, Acting Director of Environmental Protection said, “Clean Up the World in Hong Kong is a very meaningful event. Each year, together with hundreds of cities around the world, the event helped raise awareness on waste problem, especially waste produced during festive holidays. We hope people can be more conscious of the waste impact on the environment and be responsible as members of the Global Village.”

Mr. YEE Tak-Chow, General Manager (Corporate Development), HK Electric noted that: “HK Electric has supported this event for 21 consecutive years and are pleased to see the progress made over the years. Our volunteers also actively participated in the appeal action over the past years.”

At today’s ceremony, Green Power released the latest survey results on “Consumption and Celebration Habits during Mid-Autumn Festival”, covering the consumption of mooncakes, lanterns and glow sticks and food waste during family reunion dinners. The survey was initiated in 2004, and assesses the consumption and behavioural changes compared with previous years.

Mooncakes not everybody’s favourite

Last year, respondents' families consumed an average of around 8 mooncakes last year, and discarded 0.76 mooncakes. This reflects an improvement on the problem of discarded mooncakes in recent years. However, **Henry LUI, Senior Conservation Manager, Green Power** reminds people that, “The waste situation in Hong Kong is still serious due to high sales rates. It is estimated that families in Hong Kong disposed of 1.85 million mooncakes last year.”¹

Although mooncakes are popular gifts among friends during the festival, the survey showed that mooncakes are not everybody's favourites. Nearly 70% said mooncakes are not their cup of tea. In fact, 20% of which strongly indicated their dislike. Many believe that moon gazing or having dinner together are much better alternatives. Yet, many respondents and their families estimate that they will buy up to three boxes of mooncakes, mostly to give to other people. A third of the respondents expect to receive more mooncakes than they need. Offering mooncakes as gifts is obviously customary rather than necessary, and results in more waste being generated as people continue so doing." **Henry LUI** recommends that people should change their mind set by first understanding other peoples' needs.

Rise in number of glow sticks disposed

The survey found that people purchase mooncakes based on brands and pricing, rather than the packaging and environmental considerations. This has remained much the same for many years. **Green Power** has surveyed 11 main local brands and found the brand with the most packaging has 36 items, while the least has 10. Furthermore, among the 11 local brands, only one uses environmentally friendly packaging. **Henry LUI** says, "I found that one brand has individual metallic boxes for each mooncake, which is extremely wasteful! Also, nearly all mooncakes have individual plastic containers for each mooncake, and packaging of mooncakes continues to offer plastic cutlery. Packaging not for hygiene purpose should be discontinued," he said.

Lanterns are also popular items in the celebration of Mid-Autumn Festival. The survey found that more than 75% of families will re-use their plastic lanterns. From the results, **Henry LUI** pointed out that reusing plastic lanterns is a practical approach, noting that popular plastic lanterns are very durable. A small lantern easily stored away can be re-used for many years.

Henry LUI has also been aware of a growing trend in people playing with glow sticks instead of lanterns. Respondent families have disposed of an average of 50 glow sticks. From this number, it is estimated that families throughout Hong Kong disposed of 360 million glow sticks last year.² **Henry LUI** says the life of a glow stick is very short. It is disposed of after use and cannot be reused or recycled. Fluorescent agents such as Ethidium Bromide and Rhodamine B are harmful chemicals to the body and may pollute the soil and water sources if not properly disposed of. "Glow sticks are harmful and are sold by the dozens in boxes, exacerbating the waste problem," says **Henry LUI**. "People should refrain from buying glow sticks for their children this year."

70% of people purposely prepare more food

During Mid-Autumn Festival, over half of the correspondent families have food waste problems in preparation of reunion dinners. In general, around 20% to 40% of the food is wasted, especially meat. Nearly 70% of the correspondent families have leftover food due to the traditional view that “there should be more food during the festivities”. **Henry LUI** said the problem of leftover food after the Mid-Autumn festival family reunion dinner is longstanding, though the situation has slightly improved in recent years. Although nearly half of the people will later consume the leftovers, there are still 20% of people who will simply dispose it. **Henry LUI** recommends people to emphasise “quality over quantity”, and deal with the problem of leftover food at source by preparing suitable amounts of food that family members enjoy, rather than a lavish banquet with unnecessary leftovers.

Making a Pledge for a Waste-less Mid-Autumn Festival

A pledge action event provided Hong Kong people with five “Waste-less Mid-Autumn” tips was held, addressing the problem of waste during the Mid-Autumn Festival. **Big Waster** made a special appearance together with the guests, to learn about the tips at today’s “Waste-less Mid-Autumn academy”.

Mr. LIU Ming Kwong, Vincent, JP, Acting Director of Environmental Protection, began teaching **Big Waster** how to avoid wasting mooncakes, which were “Think before buying, don’t waste mooncakes” and “Ask before buying mooncakes for others.” Based on the numbers of mooncakes given as gifts and consumed, make a shopping list for this year and ask the recipients of gifts regarding their needs beforehand, and offer fruits and other gifts that don’t require packaging, or gifts with a longer shelf life, such as dried seafood. **Mr. YEE Tak-Chow**, General Manager (Corporate Development), HK Electric taught, “Say no to glow sticks” and “Reuse plastic lanterns”, explaining how playing with lanterns is more traditional, and less harmful to the environment. By storing a lantern carefully, it can be continuously reused for many years. **Dr. Eric TSANG Po Keung**, Chairman of Green Power, focused on food remaining after the Mid-Autumn Festival family reunion dinner, teaching “Don’t have leftovers from reunion dinners” and suggested the amount of food prepared should be less than normal, because festive foods such as sweet glutinous rice balls, mooncakes or fruits are normally eaten after the family reunion dinner. Therefore, being about 60% full is most appropriate.

Apart from the guests appearing as "professors" for the "Waste-less Mid-Autumn academy", a group of students from SKH Holy Cross Primary School played the "Waste-less Exercise" with Big Waster by combining the five tips into five easy-to-remember morning exercises, promoting the message of "Waste-less Mid-Autumn Festival" in a simple way.

After the ceremony, HK Electric volunteers and students from SKH Holy Cross Primary School encouraged people near Central Pier to take the "Waste-less Mid-Autumn Festival" pledge. A participating primary 6 student, **CHU Sing Yu**, said "Although playing with glow sticks is great fun, it will create pollution. This year, I pledge to not play with glow sticks any more. I hope other people can be like me, and do the same." Another student who joined in, **CHENG Tan Yuet** in primary 6, said "My mum and dad usually buy mooncakes for family and friends. This year they pledged to offer less mooncakes as gifts, and instead go moon gazing together. I think by creating less waste, moon gazing can be a more pleasurable experience!"

"Don't be a Big Waster at Mid-Autumn Festival" Pledge Action Event

The activities officially start today, providing people with five "Waste-less Mid-Autumn" tips beginning with Mid-Autumn festival foods and celebration activities. These can reduce waste created during the Mid-Autumn Festival and alleviate the pressures on landfills. People taking the pledge for a "Waste-less Mid-Autumn Festival" online can get a set of food clips.

"Don't be a Big Waster at Mid-Autumn Festival" Pledge:

www.greenpower.org.hk/cuw (webpage also includes suggestions for waste reduction for other festivals)

"Clean Up the World"

"Clean Up the World" is an international activity organised 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 organiser 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; also features environmental tips for celebrating other festivals)

Note 1 and Note 2: T Estimates are based on the estimated number of 2,431,100 households in Hong Kong in 2014, calculated by the Census and Statistics Department.