

21 September 2017

Millions of Mooncakes and Glow Sticks Disposed of Annually Green Power Calls for an Eco-friendly Mid- Autumn Festival

Green Power released the latest survey results on “Consumption and Celebration Habits during Mid-Autumn Festival”, which found that disposal of glow sticks and mooncakes remains the largest contributor of household waste during Mid-Autumn Festival. In the past year, Hong Kong families in total disposed of around 1.6 million mooncakes and 40 million glow sticks, contributing to serious wastage and environmental problems. Mid-Autumn Festival is approaching in two weeks’ time, Green Power appeals to Hong Kong people to reduce gifting of mooncakes and refrain from playing with glow sticks to enjoy an environmentally-friendly Mid-Autumn Festival.

The “Consumption and Celebration Habits during Mid-Autumn Festival” survey began in 2004, which has become a useful tool to compare changes in celebration and consumption habits during the Mid-Autumn Festival in recent years. **Henry LUI, Senior Conservation Manager of Green Power** says that the interviewed families on average consumed 7.21 mooncakes and discarded 0.64 mooncakes. The number of discarded mooncakes decreased from the record of 1.25 mooncakes in 2009 to 0.42 in 2016, which is the lowest number recorded. Though the latest figure is 0.64, which is slight increase from last year’s survey record, it is still at moderately low level. However, from the results it is projected that up to 1.6 million mooncakes are disposed of by all households in Hong Kong. ^{note2} It is enough to fill over 18 basketball courts, which is still a staggering amount of waste.

30% of the interviewed families discarded mooncakes because they “received too many”. Up to a third of the interviewees still received more mooncakes than needed. On average, interviewees would have an excess of 5 mooncakes. On the other hand, over half of the interviewees tend to dislike receiving mooncakes. Among these interviewees, 10% strongly dislike receiving mooncakes. Therefore, **Henry LUI** suggested that people should reduce the gifting of mooncakes, and take part in other activities, such as having dinner together, gifting of fruits and visiting friends. These activities were generally preferred by the interviewees as a replacement for gifting of mooncakes that would create less wastage.

Improvement in Mooncake Packaging

The survey has found that 30% of the interviewed families bought individual mooncakes for their own consumption. **Henry LUI** says that individually packaged mooncakes are more suited to the needs of people and should be encouraged. It reduces excessive consumption and greatly reduces packaging waste, as the packaging for individually packaged mooncakes are generally more simple. However, after surveying the sales of mooncakes, **Henry LUI** found that only 4 out of 8 traditional mooncake manufacturers sold individually packaged mooncakes. These individually packaged mooncakes were not cheaper than the average mooncake sold in box packaging and may even be more expensive, thereby discouraging people from purchasing them.

The survey has also found that taste, branding and pricing are the major factors affecting the choice of people in purchasing mooncakes. Only 1% of interviewees took into consideration environmental friendliness of the packaging of mooncakes. **Henry LUI** expressed his disappointment over the findings and reminded that people should pay more attention to the packaging of mooncakes. He surveyed the average 4-in-1 box packaged mooncakes sold in Hong Kong and found that each box contained at least 10 packaging components, which included a plastic tray holding the mooncakes, plastic packaging bag, dividers separating the mooncakes and a plastic knife, which is similar to previous years. Yet, decorative fabric and bead accessories found on the mooncake boxes in previous years have disappeared, and more mooncake manufacturers have introduced environmentally-packaged mooncakes, or designed mooncake boxes that encouraged reuse. This shows that mooncake manufacturers are placing more attention in environmental friendly packaging.

Work together to phase-out glow sticks

Over a third of the interviewed families used and disposed of glow sticks in the past year. Each interviewed family on average, disposed of 45.1 glow sticks. It is estimated that approximately 40 million glow sticks were disposed of by families in Hong Kong during Mid-Autumn Festival last year. ^{note2} Around 25% of the interviewed families said they will play glow sticks this year, and on average would purchase 50.8 glow sticks. It is estimated that there will still be over ten millions of glow sticks disposed of this year.



Henry LUI says glow sticks contain various toxic chemicals, including fluorescent agents such as Ethidium Bromide and Rhodamine B, improper disposal would lead to soil and water pollution. They cannot be recycled or reused. In recent years, there has been a lot of concern over the harms of glow sticks, however, over 20% of interviewees have not heard of the message. **Henry LUI** hopes that more people will understand the harm that glow sticks bring towards the environment, and he once again urged people to say no to glow sticks and eliminate the use of such items as soon as possible.

With the implementation of the "municipal solid waste charges" (waste disposal levy) in the future, public will have to pay for the disposal of garbage. The survey found that half of the respondents would therefore reduce the use of items during festival celebrations. **Henry LUI** says that economic incentives could effectively reduce consumption during festival celebrations, but while the soonest implementation of the waste disposal levy is in 2019, he hopes that people can start from this year by gradually changing wasteful habits and working towards an eco-friendly Mid-Autumn Festival together.

Eco-friendly Mid-Autumn Festival Suggestions by Green Power

Mooncakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the gifting of mooncakes and consult the wishes and needs of the receiver • Replace the gifting of mooncakes with treating meals, gifting of fruits or friendly visits • Purchase individually packaged mooncakes that more suit one's needs • Purchase mooncakes using simple and environmentally-friendly packaging
Glow sticks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refrain from playing with glow sticks • Help to phase out the use of glow sticks as an item used during Mid-Autumn festival celebrations
Reunion dinners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order or prepare dishes and food according to needs. Avoid excess. • Take away or save leftover food

Note 1: Survey focused on mooncake, lanterns and glow sticks, to understand people's habits during the celebration of the Mid-Autumn Festival. The survey was divided into two parts. The first part was conducted last year, three months after the Mid-Autumn Festival (2016; Survey A), while the second part was conducted this year, approximately a month before Mid-Autumn Festival (2017; Survey B). 328 and 334 surveys were completed respectively. The survey was conducted in street interview format outside MTR stations in Central, Tsim Sha Tsui, Tsuen Wan.

Note 2: Estimates are based on the estimated number of 2,498,900 households in Hong Kong in 2016, as given by the Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong.