

7th September, 2016

Mooncake Waste Lowest in Decade

Green Power Urges Mooncake Producers Prevent Over-packaging

Green Power announced the latest findings of the yearly survey on “Consumption and Celebration Habits during Mid-Autumn Festival”^{note1}. The survey was started in 2004 to learn about the public habits on purchasing mooncakes, lanterns and glow sticks and reunion dinner during the Mid-Autumn Festival. Mooncake waste has always ranked top as the most serious problem. The latest survey found that mooncake waste reached record low last year, comparing with the findings in the past 12 years. Nonetheless, there were still an estimated one million mooncakes thrown away by all households in Hong Kong. The amount of discarded glowing sticks and leftover from reunion dinner also showed an increase. The Mid-Autumn Festival is now a week away. Green Power called for the public to celebrate a greener festival with less waste. Green Power also urged mooncake producers to pay attention to the issue of over-packaging and make more environmentally friendly mooncakes.

Throwing away one million mooncakes

The survey found that on average each household consumed seven mooncakes and threw away 0.42 mooncake last year, which was the lowest figure since the survey began in 2004. It was only 34% of the peak record in 2008. Mooncake waste problem has improved. However, extrapolation from the survey revealed that a total of 1.04 million of mooncakes were thrown away by all households in Hong Kong^{note2}. **Mr. Henry Lui, Senior Conservation Manager of Green Power**, reminded Hong Kong people to reduce waste at source by buying less and giving away less mooncakes.

Last year about 10% of the respondent families discarded mooncakes because they “received too many”. Up to a third of the interviewees still expected to receive more mooncakes than needed this year. On average, they estimate to receive an excess of 4 mooncakes. On the other hand, 60% of the respondents tend to dislike receiving mooncakes. Therefore, **Mr. Lui** suggested that people should change their habit of gifting mooncakes, and take part in other activities, such as moon-watching or having dinner together, or sending gifts that are less perishable (such as dried seafood) to create less wastage.

Over 10 packaging items in a box of mooncakes

Mr. Lui highlighted the issue of over-packaging of mooncakes. The brand, taste and price were the most important factors when people purchase mooncakes. Only 2% of the respondents took environmental friendliness of the packaging as the deciding factor when purchasing mooncakes. On the other hand, although 90% of the respondents indicated willingness to recycle mooncake boxes, only 30% actually recycled them, and over 30% threw away the mooncake boxes right away. On the responsibility of recycling mooncake boxes, most respondents (35%) stated that the government should bear the biggest responsibility.

Apart from the box, most mooncake packaging included a plastic tray that separates the individually packed mooncakes, box liner, plastic fork, etc. **Mr. Lui** remarked that most of the items are unnecessary except those for food hygiene purpose. Green Power has made a tally of the items—on average, a four-piece mooncake box contained at least 10 packaging items. Some of the more high-end gift boxes even added decorative silk cloth, bead accessories, magnetic stickers or hot-stamping. These luxury packaging materials make the mooncake boxes less recyclable. Some mooncake producers have adopted certified eco-paper as packaging material. However, the hot-stamping on the paper lowers its recycling value.

Mr. Lui commented that until the system of producers responsibility on product packaging is implemented in Hong Kong, we can only rely on the willingness of mooncake producers to provide simple and eco-packaging. There are at present only very limited choices for consumers to buy mooncakes with eco-packaging. Green Power will write and appeal to the six major mooncake producers including Maxim's Cakes, Arome Bakery, Wing Wah Cake Shop, Kee Wah Bakery, Saint Honore Cake Shop, and Hang Heung Cake Shop to call for simpler and more environmentally friendly mooncake packaging in future. **Mr. Lui** warned that we should not take the issue lightly as a once in a year problem. The over-packaging waste problem is not negligible as the amount of production and sale of mooncakes is huge.

40 million glow sticks discarded

Lanterns and glow sticks are popular items of the Mid-Autumn Festival. Most of the interviewed families reused lanterns—80% and over 40% reused their plastic and paper lanterns respectively. As for glow sticks, the amount purchased and disposed of both increased in the past three years. Nearly 40% of the respondent households had discarded glow sticks last year, and on average disposed of 42 piece. It is estimated that approximately 40 million glow sticks

were disposed of by all families in Hong Kong during Mid-Autumn Festival last year.^{note3} Around 30% of the interviewees also said they would buy glow sticks this year, and on average would purchase over 60 glow sticks. **Mr. Lui** pointed out that in recent years the long and slender glow sticks become popular. A single box contained a few dozen glow sticks, creating waste more than ever. Glow sticks cannot be recycled or reused, and the chemicals they contain may pollute the soil and water sources if they are improperly treated. The harms are many. **Mr. Lui** pleaded the public to say no to glow sticks this year.

60% of reunion dinner with leftover

The survey found that 60% of the respondent households had leftover food from their reunion dinner for Mid-Autumn Festival last year. The figure was a slight rise of 5 percentage points from previous survey. Among them 20% would discarded the leftover food right away. As for this year, over 50% would go out dining, the first time exceeding the number having reunion dinner at home. **Mr. Lui** said that as more and more families choose to dine outside, the leftover problem may become more serious, because it is more difficult to estimate the food portions prepared by different restaurants and less convenient to take away leftover food.

Mr. Lui reminded the public to prepare or order food according to their needs as much as possible, and bring their own boxes to take away leftover food as they celebrate Mid-Autumn Festival this year. It is better not to go for buffet or all-you-can-eat meals, which would create more wastage of food. In fact, studies have shown that restaurants would need to prepare 30% more food for buffet meals.

Tips for a Green Mid-Autumn Festival

Mooncakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce mooncake gift • Consult the wishes and needs of the receiver before sending mooncake gift • Replace mooncake gift with accompany in moon-watching or having a meal together • Substitute mooncakes with less perishable gifts (such as dried seafood) • Purchase mooncakes with simple and eco-friendly packaging
Lanterns / Glow Sticks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opt for small lantern that can be reused in future • Refrain from playing with glow sticks

Reunion Dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Order or prepare food according to needs to avoid waste• Take away or keep the leftover food• Refrain from celebrating the festival with buffet or all-you-can-eat meals
----------------	--

Note 1: The survey was carried out in two parts. The first part was conducted last year, three months after the Mid-Autumn Festival (2015; Survey A), while the second part was conducted this year, approximately a month before Mid-Autumn Festival (2016; Survey B). 331 and 330 responses were received respectively. The questionnaire survey was carried out outside MTR stations in Central, Tsim Sha Tsui and Tsuen Wan.

Note 2: Extrapolation was based on the number of 2,467,900 households in Hong Kong (2015 figure) by the Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong.

Note 3: Extrapolation was based on the number of 2,467,900 households in Hong Kong (2015 figure) by the Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong and that 40% of the respondent households indicated they had discarded glow sticks.

- THE END -