



4 September 2019

Refuse Rekindled - 1.9m Mooncakes & 40m Glow Sticks Wasted

Green Power Presses for Eco-friendly Moon Festival

Green Power, a local green group, has released the latest findings of "Mid-Autumn Festival Waste and Celebration Habits" survey. Result illustrates that the numbers of mooncakes and glow sticks discarded by the public last year increased from their lowest levels. As the Mid-Autumn Festival is approaching, Green Power urges the public to reflect on the waste problem and refrain from using glow sticks for a green Moon Festival.

Starting from 2004, the "Mid-Autumn Festival Waste and Celebration Habits" survey compares celebration habits and spendings of the public in the past years. **Henry LUI, Senior Conservation Manager, Green Power**, remarks that each interviewed family consumed 7.70 mooncakes and discarded 0.75 on average last year. Although the number discarded was not particularly high compared to the preceding years, it is however almost a two-fold of the lowest ever recorded (0.38) in the year before. According to the results, it is estimated that around 1.93 million mooncakes were discarded by Hong Kong families in the last Mid-Autumn Festival.

Lui notes that missing out the expiry date of mooncakes is the main reason contributed to the disposal, accounting for 40% of the total mooncake disposal. He reminds citizens to pay attention to the expiry date in order to consume or share with others in time avoid waste.

Around 30% of the interviewed families predicted that they would receive 6.7 more mooncakes than they needed on average. On the other hand, about half of the interviewees preferred not to receive any mooncakes; over 90% appreciated the alternatives, including "giving fruit", "paying for family reunion dinner" and "watching the moon together". **Lui** states that giving out mooncakes is not the most popular nor the only way to show your appreciation in Mid-Autumn Festival, thus, over-giving always leads to waste. To buy wisely, **Lui** suggests that people may ask the wishes and needs of the receivers before giving out.



Easy Match of Needs with Individual Mooncakes

In addition, **Lui** further notes that a quarter of the interviewed families bought individual mooncakes this year. He encouraged the public to look for individual mooncakes, especially for own consumption, as it is easier to match the needs as well as to reduce waste. Out of the seven surveyed major mooncake manufacturers, five offer individual mooncakes, which is considered as a choice of improved consumer-friendliness. However, in most cases, individual mooncakes are averagely priced higher than those sold in boxes, that reaches 25% higher in the most extreme case. It is crystal clear that manufacturers discourage consumers from purchasing individual mooncakes. **Lui** therefore urges producers to reduce the prices.

The team also looked into the numbers of packaging. Despite the fact that only one among the seven main mooncake brands have introduced environmentally friendly packaging, generally speaking, the packaging remains satisfactorily simple. For instance, in a box of four traditional mooncakes of white lotus seed paste with two yolks contains 10-12 pieces of packaging. Moreover, the materials used could be conveniently recycled and no extravagant packaging, for example, cloth or beads, were founded. However, some of the box sets are presented with supplementary plastic knives, **Lui** thereupon expressed that the necessity of cutleries supply remains very much in doubt.

Disposal of Glow Sticks Overtopped the Past

The numbers of families that consumed and discarded glow sticks reached a record high last year, racking up 41% of all interviewed families. Each interviewed family discarded 41.77 glow sticks on average. It is estimated that 44.3 million glow sticks were discarded by families in Hong Kong in the Mid-Autumn Festival last year.

Lui pointed out that the health and environmental threats of glow sticks have been widely discussed in recent years. He is disappointed that citizens keep consuming in a considerable quantities. Hence, **Lui** reiterates that glow stick contains numerous poisonous chemicals, including Ethidium Bromide and rhodamine B, that may wreak havoc with the environment by contaminating soil and water sources. Therefore, people should prevent the consumption of glow sticks by any means.



On the other hand, 75% of the interviewed families revealed that they would not use glow sticks anymore in 2019, while 10% suggested differently. **Lui** hopes the figure in 2019 would drop significantly after the group's appeal.

Take Action to Realise an Eco-friendly Festival

On other celebration habits, less than 40% of the interviewed families were still playing with lanterns. Most of the lantern-owners would reuse their lanterns afterwards. On average, each family discarded 0.77 lantern in 2018, most of which were paper lanterns. Regarding family reunion dinner, almost half of the interviewed families reported leftover after the meal last year, marking the average of 20% food remained as leftove that is comprised mostly by meat. The desire to “eat more lavishly” topped as the first reason, followed by the “overestimation of needs”. Nonetheless, most interviewed families eventually finished the remained food, only 17% disposed the leftover on the spot.

Over 90% of the interviewees supported the eco-friendly approach for Mid-Autumn Festival, as well as the global plastic reduction campaign and the reduction of single-use plastic during Mid-Autumn Festival. More than 80% of the interviewed families spent an eco-friendly Mid-Atumn Festival last year in various ways, including giving out fewer mooncakes, reducing leftover food at reunion dinners, as well as refraining from glow sticks.

Lui adds that most citizens are keen to eco-concerns. What requires particular attention are the overlooked details, for instance, refraining from over-consumption of festive items, choosing simple and durable items like lanterns of simple design, and avoiding playing with glow sticks.

Tips to Spend an Eco-friendly Mid-Autumn Festival

- 1. Buy Individual Mooncakes According to Receivers' Needs**
- 2. Ask Before Giving out Mooncakes to Curb Waste**
- 3. Say No to the Hazardous Glow Sticks**



Note 1: The survey focused on the consumption trends on mooncakes, lanterns and glow sticks to understand celebration habits of the Mid-Autumn Festival. Comprised of two parts, the first part was conducted three months after the Mid-Autumn Festival in 2018 (2018; Survey A), while the second part was conducted approximately a month before Mid-Autumn Festival in 2019 (2019; Survey B). 332 and 342 surveys were completed respectively. The surveys were conducted in the format of street interview outside the MTR stations of Central, Tsim Sha Tsui, Tsuen Wan.

Note 2: Calculation is based on the estimated number of 2,571,500 households in Hong Kong in 2018, as given by the Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong.

- THE END -