

26th November, 2021

Green Power urges to Reduce Impacts on the Environment Brought by Increasing Visitors to the Countryside

Local green group Green Power announced today the findings of its annual “Hong Kong Countryside Rubbish Survey” ⁽¹⁾ conducted year-on-year since 2016. The survey indicated that with visits to the countryside continued to increase since the Covid-19 outbreak, more people began to venture out into uncharted routes or spots outside designated hiking trails or camping sites, and littered in the countryside. Green Power urges the public to minimize such human impacts on the environment and be a responsible visitor when going to the countryside.

Increasing traffic to the countryside under the pandemic

Mr. Henry Lui, Senior Conservation Manager of Green Power, said that the average number of visits to the countryside has increased from 3.2 (before 2019) to 3.5 (in 2021) per month. About 30% of respondents admitted that “stabilizing pandemic situation” and “new habits developed under pandemic” were the main reasons for more frequent visits.

In terms of activity types, over 40% of the respondents indicated they had hiked more frequently under the pandemic. For “water sports”, “picnic/barbeque” and “camping”, more than 40% of the respondents said they had not performed more, while 60% said they had actually reduced the frequency. **Mr. Lui** attributed this to the closure of public barbeque sites, campsites and some of the water sports facilities under the pandemic.

Visitors venturing into uncharted spots and trails

With more visitors heading for the countryside, over 80% of the respondents said they would avoid going to popular country parks to stay away from the crowds. Almost 70% of the respondents said they would explore alternative spots other than the official ones when hiking, while 15% would veer off the existing trails and “open up” their own routes.

Mr. Lui warned that such acts would not only pose safety risks to hikers, but also bring adverse impacts on the environment. Most of the areas outside the designated trails and facilities are well-vegetated, excessive traffic may damage vegetation, accelerate soil erosion and deter plant growth.

Mr. Lui further explained, “When the soil is trampled and pressed, it will become harder, reducing water and air permeability which is harmful to plant growth and may endanger other organisms in the soil. The impacts are more profound in remote and virgin areas, which are likely to be habitats of rare floras and faunas.

Mr. Lui believed that the public may not be aware of these environmental impacts and called for more education on this by the Government and green groups.

50% of visitors generating hygiene-related waste

67% of respondents agreed that waste problem on hiking trails was severe, a record high result compared with past surveys, while 65% of the respondents, a slightly lower percentage than last year, also considered the same for coastal areas. About half of the respondents saw waste problem as severe at barbeque/picnic sites (49%) and designated campsites (53%).

Among the types of waste discarded (Q6), tissue papers were the most common (68%), followed by food packaging (61%), and then plastic bags and disinfectant wipes (48%). On average, each visitor produced one to two pieces of such rubbish items during their outing. About half of the respondents claimed that they produced hygiene-related waste including both “disposable masks” and “disinfectant wet wipes” during each visit to the countryside.

Mr. Lui was pleased to note that over half of the respondents said they would take away their own rubbish at the end of the trips, and the figure has been increasing over recent years. He also suggested that visitors should bring along their own water-proof or reusable plastic bags for keeping waste, especially those that could be easily carried away by wind.

The survey also found that more than 60% of the respondents generated an average of 2.5 pieces of plastic waste during each visit. Over 40% of the respondents may use disposable tableware during picnic or camping, of which 80% were disposable and made of plastic. **Mr. Lui** highlighted that plastic is hard to decompose, and will turn into a serious burden to the environment upon disposal. He remarked that the Government had recently carried out a consultation on the usage of plastic products and before any regulatory framework comes into being, he urged the public to reduce waste at source and avoid using one-off tableware and other disposable items.

Mr. Lui believed that countryside activities, particularly hiking, would remain popular with the pandemic still prevailing. He reminded the public to reduce waste at source, take away their own trash, and visit only designated sites and trails to avoid causing nuisance or damage to the environment.

The 29th Clean Up the World in Hong Kong

With support from **HK Electric**, **Green Power** is organizing **the 29th Clean Up the World in Hong Kong** with hiking, water sports, picnic/barbeque and camping as the main focuses for this year. Apart from providing green and low carbon tips to the public, Green Power will invite HK Electric volunteers to join clean-up activities on beaches and countryside hotspots, and help encourage local citizens to “Leave No Trace” and be responsible visitors to the countryside.

Clean Up the World in Hong Kong Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/CUW.HK

⁽¹⁾ *The annual “Hong Kong Countryside Rubbish Survey” was first launched in 2016. This year’s survey was conducted between 24th September and 12th October, 2021. A total of 331 responses were received. The survey was conducted online with respondents 16 years old or above, and had visited the countryside within the past year.*

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