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Press Release
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Greener Chinese New Year Well Supported

With Chinese New Year just around the corner, environmental group Green Power has conducted a “Survey on the Attitude and Habits of Hong Kong People towards a Greener Chinese New Year”. Survey findings reveal about 90% of respondents are willing to celebrate the new year in a green way.

Over half of them will reuse red packets and will not wrap their gifts. It is estimated these practices can conserve 74 tonnes of paper and save more than 1,200 trees. Regarding consuming endangered species for family reunion dinners, most respondents said they would not have shark fins and wild reef fishes. However, many would have sea cucumbers and fish maws, indicating these practices needed improvement.

The survey was conducted earlier this month interviewing 289 Hong Kong citizens on their views on gift wrapping, eating endangered species and using new red packets and banknotes.

About 60% of respondents (Q9c) had no objection to receiving *lai see* in old red packets, while 80% (Q9d) had no objection to receiving old banknotes. In practice, only half of them (Q5a) said they would put their *lai see* money in old red packets, and 70% (Q5b) would use old banknotes. Only 10% of respondents would give all their *lai sees* in old red packets and banknotes. If we presume the 2,240,000 families in Hong Kong ^[1] each give an average of 90 red packets, such greener practices could save more than 10,470,000 red packets and conserve 534 trees ^[2].

“With the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) advocating using ‘ying-san notes’ -- old banknotes that look new -- together with promotions by HKMA and green groups in the past two years, the practice of using old banknotes has gradually gained acceptance among Hong Kong people,” said **Dr. Cheng Luk-ki, Division Head of Scientific Research & Conservation of Green Power.**

“Plus, of course, using old banknotes saves time used in queuing up at the bank,” he added.



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However, many shops were still distributing free red packets, reducing the attraction of reusing old red packets, Dr. Cheng noted.

“It’s difficult for people to store and reuse red packets when shops distribute red packets with different sizes, colours and shapes. He urged shops to distribute red packets with standard size, colours and shapes -- such as red and rectangular, even if their patterns differ. He also urged shops to stop distributing self-adhesive red packets, as they can be used only once.

Mrs. Ginger Tang, a member of an HK Electric Green Family, said she no longer queued up at banks for new banknotes as she has given up using new banknotes for *lai sees*. “I reuse old red packets,” she said. “I use leftovers as decorations, which is good for the environment because it reduces waste while saving money.”

Each respondent planned to give an average of 4.8 gifts (Q2) this Lunar New Year. About 90% of respondents (Q9a) would not object to receiving gifts without wrapping. About half of them (Q3a) said they would give gifts without wrapping, among them 37% said they would give all gifts without wrapping.

The actions of these families can save paper equivalent to 739 trees. Raymond Tang Kin-ming, another HK Electric Green Family member, said the packaging of many gifts already look good, so there was no need to wrap them.

Regarding reunion dinners: 28% (Q7a) of respondents will have shark fins, 40% (Q7b) will have wild reef fishes (such as groupers and Leopard Coral Trout); 52% (Q7c) will have sea cucumbers; 58% (Q7d) will have fish maws, and 41% (Q7e) will have abalone.

About 67% (Q8) of respondents said they consume such endangered species because of tradition. This reveals there is room for improvement regarding traditional concepts.

“Promotions by green groups have helped make Hong Kong people aware of the threats to the environment through consuming shark fins and wild reef fishes,” said Dr Cheng. “However, there has been a shift towards eating other costly dishes such as fish maws, sea cucumbers and abalone. These species also face extinction due to over-fishing.”

As Taiwanese and Hong Kong people believe sea cucumbers have medicinal



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value, brown sea cucumber (*Isostichopus fuscus*) from Ecuador has been over-fished. This has resulted in fishermen moving north to waters near Mexico. To protect this brown sea cucumber, it has been listed in Appendix 3 of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), meaning that permits are required for trade in the species.

Dr. Cheng explained: “Fish maws are actually the swim bladders of particular species of large fish. People must kill many fish to produce fish maws. The Chinese bahaba (*Bahaba taipingensis*), which can be used for producing top classed fish maws, has been heavily harvested, to the extent it rarely reaches maturity in local waters.”

Chinese bahaba has been listed as a “critically endangered” species in the IUCN Red List. Dr Cheng urged people to note the place of origin when eating seafood and dried seafood, and avoid having sea cucumbers and fish maws.

Mrs. Tang said she learnt that having *fat choy* (black flossy moss), shark fins and humphead wrasses threatened the environment. However she was not aware of the extinction threat facing fish maws, sea cucumbers and abalone. After learning this danger, she will avoid eating such dishes.

The Tang family has introduced some environmentally friendly and auspicious dishes, such as “lettuce with dried mushrooms” signifying “Success in everything”, and “lettuce with pomelo peel”, meaning “Having ways to become rich”. The ingredients of these dishes are simple and inexpensive, cause no harm to the environment, and are healthy.

Supporting Green Power’s call for a greener Chinese New Year, HK Electric staff are also carrying out a recycling programme, collecting used items such as clothing, books, toys, etc. for donation and fund-raising for the needy.

The “Greener Festivals Campaign” is organised by Green Power and sponsored by HK Electric. It is held to remind the public to avoid being wasteful during festivals. For more environmentally friendly ways to celebrate Chinese New Year and other festivals, please visit Green Power’s website: http://www.greenpower.org.hk/new/cuw/index_e.html

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Note (1): Data from the survey of Consumers Acting for People and the Environment conducted in Lunar New Year 2005

Note (2): With 2,241,500 domestic households (Census & Statistics Department's statistics August to October 2007 data), each household giving 90 lai sees, with 52.6% of them reusing old red packets, of which 9.87% will reuse red packets (Q5a), a total of 10,473,314 red packets will be saved. Each red packet weighs about 3gm and 17 trees are required to produce a tonne of paper; hence saving 10,473,314 red packets is equivalent to saving 534 trees.

Note (3): With 2,241,500 domestic households (Census & Statistics Department's statistics August to October 2007 data), each households giving out 4.8 gifts, with 54.32% of them giving gifts without wrapping, of which 36.94% would give gifts without wrapping (Q3a), a total of 2,158,920 sheets of wrapping paper will be saved. Each sheet of wrapping paper weighs about 20gm and 17 trees are required to produce a tonne of paper, hence saving 2,158,920 sheets of wrapping paper is equivalent to saving 739 trees.

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