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GREENERS ACTION

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Press Release

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Over 46 million single-use plastic cutleries and containers are disposed in Hong Kong every week

Waste reduction policy is crucial to make citizens taking action

Greeners Action conducted a survey on single-use plastics distributed by restaurants, and the result showed that citizens consumed enormous amount of single-use plastic cutleries and containers in their daily life. It is estimated that over 46 million single-use plastics are disposed in Hong Kong every week, including plastic straws, plastic cutleries, plastic food containers and take-away plastic bags. The survey also revealed that the respondents recognized the overflowing plastic problem, but they had not changed their habit and the restaurants distributed single-use plastics for free which lead to the failure to reduce waste at source. The government is reviewing plastic bag levy and will legislate the municipal solid waste (MSW) charging, which is believed to provide an economic incentive for the public and the restaurants to reduce the use of single-use plastics.

Greeners Action interviewed 861 citizens in 8 districts between March and April this year, including Tsuen Wan, Kwai Fong, Tsing Yi, Mei Foo, Cheung Sha Wan, Shum Shui Po, Lok Fu and Wong Tai Sin. The result showed that over 10% respondents disposed of 5 or more single-use plastics distributed by restaurants every week, including plastic straws (12%), plastic cutleries (10%), plastic food containers (12%) and take-away plastic bags (15%). With a population of 7.48 million in Hong Kong, a total of 46.4 million pieces of single-use plastics are disposed every week, which is alarming. Among the four kinds of single-use plastics, disposal of take-away plastic bags is particularly serious. 15% of respondents disposed 5 or more plastic bags per week, and the disposal of 4 and 3 pieces was also 7% and 11% respectively. Greeners Action believes that although “no straw” and “no plastic” trends are becoming popular recently, there is still room for waste reduction, especially the use of plastic bags. According to Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong 2017 Report, the estimated disposal of plastic bags at landfills in 2016 was 4.39 billion, which was more than the 3.93 billion in 2015, reflecting the weakening of the plastic bag levy. The Government is reviewing the plastic bag levy, and considering cancelation of the exemption of bags for food in non-airtight

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Our work included different types of waste reduction and recycling work, such as 'Food Donation Program', 'Food Waste Audit', 'Lai See Reuse and Recycling Program' and 'Recycle Your Own Cartridge' etc. We also cooperated with Environmental Protection Department holding 'Food Waste Recycling Partnership Scheme' and 'Community Recycling Fun Shop'. Besides, we suggest and promote the plans of 'No Plastic Bag Day', 'Newspaper without Bags', 'Primary School Environmental Lunch Arrangement', 'Save Food Campaign' etc, to spread the environmental information raising the public and government's awareness. We actively hold environmental protection activities for the teenagers to increase their environmental consciousness. We encourage teenagers to be environmental leaders in the future by promoting daily trivia like using less plastic bags and reducing food waste to save Earth resources. Our website: www.greeners-action.org



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packaging or frozen and chilled food, and increasing the levy to HK\$2 per plastic bag to further reduce the amount of plastic bag disposal.

Respondents generally agreed that the issue of single-use plastics in restaurants was serious. Among them, 21% considered the problem to be very serious, showing that the citizens realize the overflowing problem of single-use plastics. When asked about the main obstacles to reduce single-use plastics, 592 (69%) of the 861 respondents considered that the public did not have the habit of bringing their own tableware, followed by the restaurant provided single-use plastics initiatively (435 respondents) and the government had no relevant regulation (310 respondents).

The survey also revealed that 463 respondents (54% of all respondents) chose to dine in instead of takeaways to reduce usage of single-use plastics. Greeners Action believes that the general public has a sense of waste reduction, but they cannot turn awareness into action to bring reusable tableware. Meanwhile restaurants actively provide single-use plastics to customers as a convenient measure, discouraging the public to bring their own tableware for takeaway. Greeners Action is pleased to see that 54% of the citizens are willing to dine in to reduce single-use plastic usage, and hope that more restaurants and citizens will adopt this simple and straightforward approach.

Greeners Action considers that the Government's waste reduction policy is crucial because there is no economic incentive for the public and restaurants to improve their habits. The Government introduced the Waste Disposal (Charging for Municipal Solid Waste "MSW") (Amendment) Bill 2018 to the Legislative Council in November 2018. Greeners Action considers MSW charging will provide economic incentive to the public and restaurants to reduce usage of single-use plastics. Another survey conducted by several green groups also pointed out that 78% of respondents agreed that the bill should be passed as soon as possible. Therefore, Greeners Action urged Legislative Council Members to listen to public opinion and strive to pass the bill in 2019.

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80% of the public are willing to patronize “Shops towards 0 Plastics”. Small incentive can attract them to bring their own tableware

It is worth noting that the survey found that more than 75% respondents were very willing or willing to patronize restaurants that did not provide single-use plastics. 63% agreed that the incentive offering by restaurants to customers who bring their own food containers to buy takeaways was very attractive or attractive.

Many merchants think that taking the initiative to provide single-use plastics is customer service, but it was not reflected in the survey. The public is very supportive of the "Shops towards 0 Plastics" or the incentive for customers to bring their own tableware. Taking the Tsing Yi Opera Festival as an example, Greeners Action was responsible for public education and encouraging the food stalls to provide incentive to their customers who bring their own tableware, e.g. larger portions and discounts, encouraged the public to borrow reusable tableware in the site instead of using single-use plastics.

“Hong Kong people disposes 46 million single-use plastics per week. 80% respondents recognize the overflowing plastic problem, but they cannot turn awareness into action to bring reusable tableware when takeaway. We need to put more effort to educate the citizens to BYO (Bring Your Own Container).” said Jac Lun Ka-yu, the Senior Project Officer conducting the research.

Starbucks launched the "A Change Is Brewing" sustainability campaign in April. All stores stopped using plastic straws and stirrers, and switched to paper straws and wooden stirrers, to achieve the goal of reducing plastic waste by 30% by 2020. Starbucks has also been offering a HK\$4 discount for many years to encourage customers to bring their own tumbler. Last year, the average daily usage of the discount was over 3,600 times. Greeners Action welcomes companies to respond to the “no plastic” appeal, and expects more restaurants to develop a plastic reduction policy as soon as possible.

Funded by the Sustainable Development Fund, Greeners Action launches “No More Plastic Action” campaign in 2019-2020. Restaurants will be invited to take the initiative to become "Shops towards

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0 Plastics" (S.T.O.P.), a pledging program in the campaign. Participating merchants who do not sell over-packaged products or not to provide single-use tableware to customers, will be issued a "S.T.O.P." label for identification. Greeners Action believes that the results of the survey will encourage the restaurants to reduce single-use plastics and join the "S.T.O.P." pledging program.

According to the Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong 2017 Report, the average daily disposal of 2,124 tonnes of plastics accounted for 19.8% of all municipal solid waste. Among them, plastic bags and plastic cutleries alone accounted for 37.3% (793 tonnes) and 7.8% (166 tonnes) respectively.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Ms. Jac Lun Ka-yu, Senior Project Director of Greeners Action (Tel: 6659 7636/email: jaclun@greeners-action.org). Thank you for your support of environmental protection!



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