

Press Release

**Supermarkets' Record-breaking Collaboration
'Around the World in Ten Days' - Appalling Plastic Bag Abuse**

The problem of plastic bags abuse has been deteriorating despite more than a decade's effort in lobbying for reduction of plastic bags abuse. At present, 24 million plastic bags are being used per day in Hong Kong - in other words, 3.6 bags per capita per day, ranking top in the world. Since last year, Green Student Council, an environmental protection group run by local students, has been following up with this issue through a series of campaigns and surveys.

As a follow-up measure to the Survey concerning Situation of Supermarket Plastic Bags Overuse carried out last November, the Green Student Council successfully interviewed 521 supermarket shoppers in July this year. According to the survey, every one out of three plastic bags given out by the supermarkets is overused. Based on the figure that 10 million plastic bags are given out per day, 3.34 million plastic bags are actually being overused every single day. In other words, the number of plastic bags wasted by supermarkets in Hong Kong each year reaches an appalling 1,220 million - If the plastic bags consumed by supermarkets in a day are spread out on the ground, they are enough to cover the Tsing Ma Bridge in twelve full layers. Or, if they are lined up one after another, they can go a round trip between Hong Kong and Beijing. Furthermore, in just 10 days, the total length of the plastic bags consumed would be enough to go around the Equator.

Consumption being the Market's Leading Force
82% of Interviewees Support Green Supermarkets

Another finding of the survey is that 82% of the interviewees are willing to become customers of green supermarkets instead, given that these supermarkets bring green 'plastic bag reduction' campaigns into effect. It can be deduced from the finding that plastic bag reduction campaigns are well-received by the public, thus, they are of high market potential to various shops and supermarkets. No matter for environmental protection or for business opportunities, 'greenness' can as well be seen as an objective of future business development.

The Green Student Council considers this response encouraging and showing mature environmental consciousness among the citizens. The Council calls for the citizens to utilize their consumers' power and duty, be customers of businesses that fulfill their environmental duties, and wash out polluters from the market.

Existing Rebate Programs being Mere Gestures
Citizens Support \$0.5 Charge per Bag

As a result of the Council's continuous efforts in lobbying for 'anti-plastic bag abuse' since last year and the consequent wide coverage in the media, the degree of public concern towards the issue has been considerably increased. Findings show that the percentage of citizens who know about the '10-cent rebate' policy has rose significantly from last year's 33% to 53.7% this year, accounting for a 20% soar. However, on the contrary, the plastic bag abuse problem worsened drastically among the two supermarkets – last year, 1 out of 4 bags were excessive; this year, the rate reaches even higher, 1 out of 3 plastic bags given out by supermarkets are actually wasted.

Moreover, this year's survey also shows that only 11% of the cashiers, compared to 15% last year, ask customers whether they need plastic bags. The fall shows that supermarkets, ranging from administrative level to junior level, show a general lack of earnestness in coping with the problem of plastic bag abuse. The worsening of the problem in spite of improved public awareness is a sign that the 10-cent rebate policy is not at all attractive to the public. Apparently, the two major supermarkets' half-heartedness in pushing forward the rebate program has caused the policy's fiasco.

64% of the interviewees agree to the Council's proposal to reduce bag abuse by means of extra charge and cash rebate – among them, 65% support that the charge/rebate should be increased to 50 cents, 22% agree to \$1 charge/rebate, in the belief that a higher charge/rebate helps achieve the aim of boosting citizens' motivation to reduce bag abuse. This reflects that citizens do place great concern to the problem of pollution, and are willing to give up the convenience of using excessive plastic bags, even at their own monetary expense. This further proves that the hollow gesture of an insignificant 10-cent rebate is neither sufficient nor efficient as an inducement for plastic bag reduction.

Major Polluters Fail to Fulfill 'Producers' Duty'
Enterprises Reaping at Citizens' Expense

'24 million plastic bags consumed per day', or '3.6 bags consumed per person per day' are not mere figures – this also means substantial pressure to the waste dumps which are already near saturation, and an annual HKD\$40m expenditure in processing the waste bags. Those who pay for the enormous processing fee are the taxpayers, not the well-off entrepreneurs (a.k.a. polluters).

The Council criticizes that the two largest supermarkets in Hong Kong get away with the pollution problems while leaving the burden to the public. The Council is of the opinion that the supermarkets, as the largest polluters in terms of plastic bag disposal, are obliged to perform their 'producers' duty' – to take the lead in reducing plastic bag abuse, and to raise the plastic bag rebate/charge to a minimum of 50 cents as soon as possible. Spokesperson for the Council, Ms Ying Ying Kwok, says, 'Park'n Shop and Wellcome claim that they support environmental protection, but they are reluctant to cooperate with the citizens and the government, and they fail to take up their duties as a polluter. We had submitted a proposal to the two supermarkets, stating concretely the details concerning the 50-cent policy, but they insisted that the existing 10-cent rebate policy is already highly effective despite failing to produce actual data supporting their claim. According to data from the EPD and campaigns that our Council carried out, the consumption of plastic bags has been increasing instead of falling.'

Shenzhen Charges Users for Plastic Bags
Whereas Hong Kong Lags Behind in Green Policies

As a matter of fact, supermarkets in Hong Kong are very backwards in terms of their ways of handling plastic bag pollution problems, causing today's serious situation. Supermarkets all over the world have been carrying green policies way ahead of Hong Kong, for example, Ireland and many other European countries stopped giving out plastic bags for free a long time ago, on top of that, independent green funds were set up to support businesses - thus introducing a win-win situation and establishing a green consumption culture. Today, major cities in the Mainland like Shenyang, Shanghai, and even Shenzhen and Guangzhou are supporting the 'no plastic bags for free' movement in succession, and their efforts contribute to prominent success. How can Hong Kong justify herself as an international metropolitan, while her green policies are not even comparable to the Mainland's?

Country / City	Free plastic bags given out by supermarkets	Charges / tax for plastic bags
Mainland China (in cities like Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Shenyang and Shanghai)	No	Yes (amount to be fixed)
Taiwan	No	Yes (NTD\$1)
Ireland	No	Yes (0.15 Euro)
Hong Kong	Yes	No

Hong Kong, being an advanced and progressive city, should not leave her green policies backward and ineffective. The government should start from the citizens' daily lives and solve the plastic bag pollution problem. On one hand, pollution can be reduced and expenditures saved; on the other, resources can be better utilized and international image can be enhanced – pushing for green policies is undoubtedly beneficial to the public, to businesses and to the government.

The Green Student Council's Calls

1. Wellcome and Park'n Shop, being the largest polluters, must perform their producers' duty and stop giving out free plastic bags;
2. Hong Kong citizens should utilize their consumers' power and rights, be patrons of green businesses and wash polluting businesses out of the market;
3. the two major supermarkets should respond to the public's demands immediately and carry out the '50-cent charge and rebate for each plastic bag' policy;
4. the government should enhance publicity and education, and foster the BYOB (bring your own bag) concept;
5. the government should put the plastic bag charges policy into effect, and set up green funds as soon as possible.

Lastly, the Council expresses that in the coming months it will continue to lobby for plastic bag reduction at supermarkets in various districts. They will keep persuading consumers to make further efforts in environmental protection and say 'no' to supermarket plastic bags, and also to make use of their consumer power and right to stop buying at environmentally-irresponsible shops. The Council believes that its members' perseverance will solve the long-standing plastic bag problems in Hong Kong.

-The End-

About the Green Student Council

GSC is a local registered environmental group, established in 1993. It is currently led by a team of secondary school students, university students and other young enthusiasts. The council is aimed at arousing environmental protection awareness in the community. Past accomplishments include the creation of concern group for Nam San Wai Development Event, the campaign for banning polystyrene, the campaign for selling newspapers with no plastic bags, etc. The council has co-organized with Friends of the Earth and several mainland environmental groups a training camp on environmental protection for participants to exchange

ideas and share experience. Recently, the council is actively holding various activities in secondary schools so as to boost the awareness of environmental protection among youngsters.

This was released by Green Student Council. For any enquires, please feel free to get in touch with Mr. Angus Ho or Ms. YingYing Kwok.

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