



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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## Press Statement

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### A HAPPY AND HEALTHY CHINESE NEW YEAR

The festive mood of Chinese New Year has started with families planning the most important meal of the year – the Reunion Dinner – whereby family members have to head for home from wherever they are to have the dinner together. Chinese New Year marks the beginning of Spring and the celebration of Spring over the next 15 days is symbolic of the survival of a bitterly cold winter that had just ended.

The Reunion Dinner is prepared by family members of a household and it is its preparation on a *gotong royong* basis that helps in family bonding. We should preserve that tradition rather than going to restaurants to hold the Reunion Dinner, losing sight of the value that our forefathers handed down to us.

Family members then gather around to eat from the same steaming pot and share the comforting heat of the fire. In order to do that everyone has to leave their grouses, animosity – and handphones – behind and sit together, engaging in civil conversation. It symbolises the beginning of a new, better life for the new year.

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) wishes everyone celebrating Chinese New Year '*Xin Nian Kuai Le*' and hopes that we are always mindful of the quantity of food prepared or ordered from restaurants during this auspicious festival. It is a time to contemplate on how much food are wasted and how the less fortunate would have wished for the opportunity to relish the dishes that we dispose.

Let us not indulge in a wasteful habit during the entire festival just because we can afford to order more food than needed because Chinese has always considered food as a manifestation of luck and is thus a blessing to be able to enjoy it.

Food wastage is a perennial problem in the country. CAP estimated RM16.8 billion of food is lost or wasted during preparation, cooking, and leftovers. We have always thought that, as a host, we have to ensure that all attending the meal should have more than enough to eat. More often than not, our generosity resulted in large amount of leftovers that go into the waste bin.

According to SWCorp, Malaysians waste 15,000 tonnes of food daily and this quantity spikes by another 15-20 percent during festivals. We have to remember that it is not only food that is wasted but other resources such as water, energy, and labour go along with it. For example, it takes seconds to dump a plate of rice into the waste bin but it took 100 days and 1,000 litres of water to produce a kilogramme of rice.

Much of the wasted food ends up in landfills where they decompose into methane which is a greenhouse gas many times more destructive than carbon dioxide. Moreover, consumers do not realise that food wasted contributes to food price increase. The escalation of food prices is attributed to by an increase in demand and aggravated by the fact that we imported most of our food.

The auspicious Chinese New Year should be ushered with wholesome food to symbolise health. For that we pay more attention in having more fruits and green leafy vegetables, avoid processed food, and cut down on sweet and salty foods. Anyway, green leafy vegetables symbolise a vibrant life.

Let this Chinese New Year be more meaningful than the previous ones but first we have to understand the significance of Chinese New Year in order to appreciate it better.

With the New Year around the corner we will be deluged by advertisements trying to convince us to part with our hard-earned money. Let us carefully consider whatever we spend during the 15 days of the New Year and how the expenses could be saved or spend on more essential items for the family during the next 12 months. Savings is always useful in times of need.

Let us understand the deeper significance of the *ang pow* (red packet). It was given out to children as *ya sui qian* (literally meaning “pressing age money” in Chinese) to symbolically wish that the children will overcome problems that they face during the year. Therefore, the amount is immaterial as the intention of giving the *ang pow* is of paramount importance. Once when we embrace this principle, we would understand that we embarrass family members and relatives who cannot afford to compete in giving big *ang pows* and some of those who managed match up will experience an excruciating family budget after the New Year.

When we pray at the temple or at home, we should try to avoid lighting big joss-sticks or burn large quantities of joss-papers. The reason is that pure intention matters rather than burning joss-sticks or joss-papers. It detracts from the main purpose of communicating with the ‘heart’ but instead result in money being wasted and air being pollution. The acrid smoke from the incense is bad for those who have respiratory ailments or eye condition.

Fire crackers and other forms of explosives should not be part of the Chinese New Year celebration if we believe in mindfulness. This is because when we let off fire crackers, we startle animals, babies, the elderly and those depriving the less healthy a good rest.

With that, we at the Consumers’ Association of Penang (CAP) wishes all a healthy and happy Chinese New Year and may there be a positive transformation in your lives.

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**President**  
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