

## **Dirty Air A Grave Problem in Hong Kong**

Air pollution is a major environmental problem in Hong Kong. A study conducted by the University of Hong Kong showed that approximately 20% of days is in poor visibility in Hong Kong every year. The concentration of pollutants has doubled the Air Quality Index by the World Health Organization (WHO). When the Index is out of the acceptable level, our health will be threatened. Statistics showed that the number of hospital admissions has greatly increased, resulting in respiratory and cardiovascular problems. Also, 1,600 mortality cases were indirectly caused by these health problems. The cost of medical expenditure has been incurred over HK\$200 millions.

There are a number of chemical pollutants in the air, including nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), ozone, carbon monoxide and respirable suspended particulates, etc. The more the advanced the industrial development, the more the discharge of chemical pollutants will be found in the air, posing a threatening hazard to human beings and the ecological environment.

Another study conducted by the Department of Community Medicine of HKU revealed that the concentration of sulphur dioxide was rapidly reduced after the restriction of sulphur content in fuels in 1990, so the mortality rate was gradually decreased, with decreasing trend due to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases of around 2% and 4% respectively. However, the concentration of other pollutants remained the same level. Hence, the average life expectancy of people in Hong Kong was estimated to be increased for 20 to 40 days.

To improve the air quality in Hong Kong, the government and the public should join hands to combat air pollution.