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## PRESS RELEASE

(For Immediate Release)

### **Hedley Environmental Index reveals external costs of air pollution**

*Website presents public health & financial impacts in real-time*

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**HONG KONG, 18 December 2008** – Independent Public Policy think tank Civic Exchange today launched The *Hedley Environmental Index*, a new website which for the first time quantifies the public health and monetary costs of air pollution in Hong Kong.

The Index shows that air pollution has cost Hong Kong almost 2 billion dollars, over 1,100 deaths, 78,000 hospital bed-days and over 6.2 million doctor visits so far this year.

“People see smoggy days and know that air pollution damages their health. Now they can see for themselves the cold hard facts, and they make ugly reading.” said Professor Anthony Hedley, Chair in Community Medicine, Hong Kong University School of Public Health. “The Index makes clear that we are facing an epidemic. The cause is air pollution, and we know exactly how much it is costing the community.”

The Index, which relates four specific pollutants in Hong Kong’s atmosphere to the risks of death and illness and compiles the associated costs, is named in honour of Professor Hedley. It is based on peer-reviewed research conducted by his team.

“Hong Kong currently lacks the legislation, the air quality standards and the administrative procedures to address the problem,” said Christine Loh, CEO, Civic Exchange. “By showing how far our pollution exceeds the World Health Organization’s Air Quality Guidelines, and how much this is costing us in dollars and affecting lives, the Hedley Environmental Index lays down a marker, minute by minute, that tells us all exactly how much we have to do.”

Setting the context for the development and release of the Index, Ms Loh also noted that the current review of the Hong Kong Air Quality Objectives for the first time in over 20 years proved an opportunity to put into place some of the infrastructure to bring Hong Kong’s air pollution on a par with other world cities such as Los Angeles and London, that have succeeded in reducing air pollution without harming economic development.

“Friends of the Earth has linked the Hedley Environmental Index to our website because we believe it is essential for people to be properly informed of the risks our air pollution imposes on our daily lives,” noted Edwin Lau, Director of Friends of the Earth (HK). “We believe that the more people know how toxic our air is, the harder it is for Government to downplay the seriousness of the problem, and the sooner we will see meaningful action. We hope more NGOs, and even media organizations will consider creating a link to the Index, as we have done.”

Ms Loh closed with an invitation to Civic Exchange’s 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2009 conference to discuss solutions to Hong Kong’s air pollution: “The Air We Breathe – a Public Health Dialogue”.

*Visit us at: [www.civic-exchange.org](http://www.civic-exchange.org)*

**“Hedley Environmental Index”:**

<http://sph.hku.hk/hedleyindex>

**Civic Exchange Conference “The Air We Breathe – A Public Health Dialogue”:**

[www.civic-exchange.org/eng/event\\_airconference2009.aspx](http://www.civic-exchange.org/eng/event_airconference2009.aspx)

**Email for public submissions: review of air quality objectives and air strategy:**

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