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PRESS RELEASE
(For Immediate Release)

A Price Too High
Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Southern China

10,000 deaths a year in southern China: can the region's inhabitants afford to wait?

New data on health costs for Hong Kong, Macao and the Pearl River Delta

(11th June 2008) Hong Kong based think tank Civic Exchange releases a groundbreaking study today entitled "A Price Too High – Health Impacts of Air Pollution in southern China". The study - conducted by leading health, science and public policy experts - reveals new regional data on the health costs of poor air quality. Annual deaths attributable to air pollution – based on 2006 data - are estimated at 10,000 in Hong Kong, Macau and the Pearl River Delta, with over 90% occurring in the Pearl River Delta. Air pollution is also responsible for 440,000 annual hospital bed-days and 11 million annual outpatient visits throughout the region.

In money terms, the hospital bed-days, lost productivity and doctor visits associated with this health impact cost RMB 1.8 billion a year in the PRD, HK\$ 1.1 billion in Hong Kong, and HK\$ 18 million in Macao. Adjusted for differences in gross domestic product across the region, the health-related monetary costs of air pollution in the PRD amount to RMB 6.7 billion. Professor Anthony Hedley from Department of Community Medicine at Hong Kong University explains: "This analysis is the first step in assessing the PRD region-wide health impact from air pollution. It is an essential exercise in accountability to protect the health of both present and future generations in south China."

In spite of the enormous health costs of deteriorating air quality, there is surprisingly little research in the region into the links between air pollution and poor health. According to the study, in the past 25 years only 147 such reports have been conducted for all of mainland China, with only 37 of those concerned with southern China. Professor Wong Tze Wai, a public health specialist from Chinese University, who conducted the literature review, says: "Public health research is severely deficient in China compared to the scale of the problem and there were actually no local public health studies covering the heavy manufacturing areas of Shenzhen, Dongguan and Foshan, which experience some of the worst air quality in the region."

The current air pollution indexes used in Hong Kong and the PRD are not merely insufficient but misleading, as they are not directly linked with health protection. In the words of Professor Alexis Lau from the Institute for Environment at Hong Kong University of Science and technology: "Only by reviewing air pollution data and evaluating existing policy measures will it be possible to devise the most appropriate control strategies to stem the deterioration." He adds: "Conducting new government-led reviews of regional emission data, as well as revising regional Air Quality Objectives to be in line with the

World Health Organisation (WHO) air quality guidelines, would provide powerful drivers to improve air quality and public health.”

Christine Loh, CEO of Civic Exchange, called for collaborative action between Hong Kong and Guangdong to be taken before Hong Kong and Guangzhou host the East Asian and Asian Games in 2009 and 2010, respectively. “This action will allow southern China to take advantage of lessons learned from Beijing in 2008 and to position itself as a leader for the rest of the mainland on effectively addressing air pollution problems.”

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For enquiries, please contact:

- Ms Christine Loh: Civic Exchange
(Email: cloh@civic-exchange.org / Mobile: 9802 8888)
- Ms. Michele Weldon: Civic Exchange
(Email: mweldon@civic-exchange.org / Office: 2893 0213 or Mobile: 6271 4147)
- Ms. Michelle Wong: Civic Exchange
(Email: mwong@civic-exchange.org / Office: 2893 0213 or Mobile: 93615947)

For additional comments, please contact:

- Professor Anthony Hedley: HKU, Department of Community Medicine
commed@hkucc.hku.hk 2819 9282 or 9079 2233
- Professor T W Wong: CUHK, Department of Community and Family Medicine
twong@cuhk.edu.hk 93047636
- Dr Alexis Lau: HKUST, Institute for the Environment
alau@ust.hk 9181 1428

Full report and presentation are available on Civic Exchange website:

- Full Health Report:
http://www.civic-exchange.org/eng/upload/files/200806_pricetoohigh.pdf
- Presentation:
http://www.civic-exchange.org/eng/upload/files/200806_pricetoohighppt.pdf
- Full Literature review:
http://www.civic-exchange.org/eng/upload/files/200806_APHealthStudiesChina.pdf

Other references:

- Air Pollution: Costs and Paths to a solution
http://www.civic-exchange.org/eng/upload/files/200606_AirPollutionSolution.pdf
- Air Quality Objective Concern Group submissions to Legco and to Sustainable Development Council
http://www.civic-exchange.org/eng/upload/files/200611_ReviewAirQuality.pdf
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- An Air Management Plan for Hong Kong
http://www.civic-exchange.org/eng/upload/files/200609_AirManagementPlan.pdf