

Summary Of Key Findings

# LESS TALK, MORE ACTION

Public Opinion Survey on  
Air Pollution in Hong Kong 2010

December 2010

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## Public Opinion Survey on Air Pollution in Hong Kong 2010

### Summary of Key Findings

In May and June of 2010, the Hong Kong Transition Project conducted a survey on behalf of Civic Exchange on Hong Kong people's experience of, and reactions to, air pollution. The survey included 600 randomly selected members of the public aged 18 and over, and 415 randomly selected professional drivers.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, similar questions were asked in surveys done in 2001 and 2008, and the responses can be compared. This is, however, the first time that professional drivers were surveyed alongside the general public.

#### Seven Key Findings

**1.** One in four Hong Kong residents is considering emigrating because of air pollution, up from one in five in 2008. Those considering leaving tend to be wealthier, better educated, and employed as managers or professionals.

**2.** People in general are discussing air pollution less frequently than they did in 2008. However, the richest and most educated are discussing it most, especially with their bosses.

**3.** Most people believe that the government considers their health and children's health most when setting air pollution policy, and generally trust the information on air pollution that the government provides.

**4.** However, many people do not trust the government to set and enforce air pollution standards.

**5.** While most people go along with the government's proposed air pollution control measures, strong supporters are outnumbered by those who strongly disapprove.

**6.** Professional drivers are most concerned about pollution from roadside emissions.

**7.** Professional drivers suffer from air pollution-related symptoms with about the same frequency as the general public.

<sup>1</sup> Thirty of the respondents from the general public sample happened to be professional drivers, and their responses were counted in both samples. In total, 985 people were interviewed.

# 1. If you can't breathe, leave

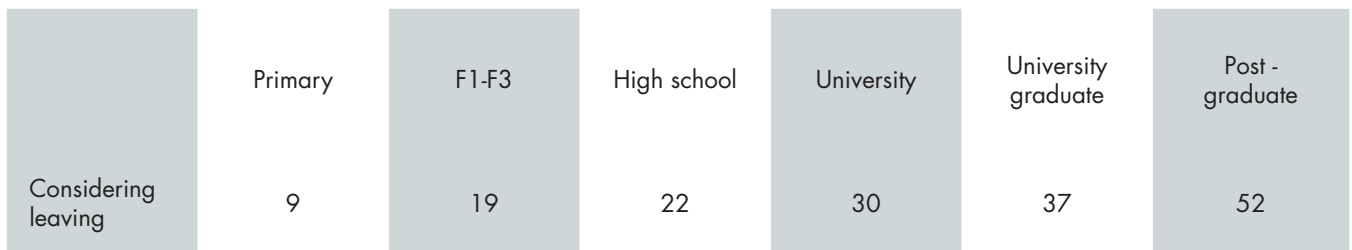
One in four Hong Kong residents is considering emigrating because of air pollution. This is close to 2 million people. Two years ago, it was one in five.



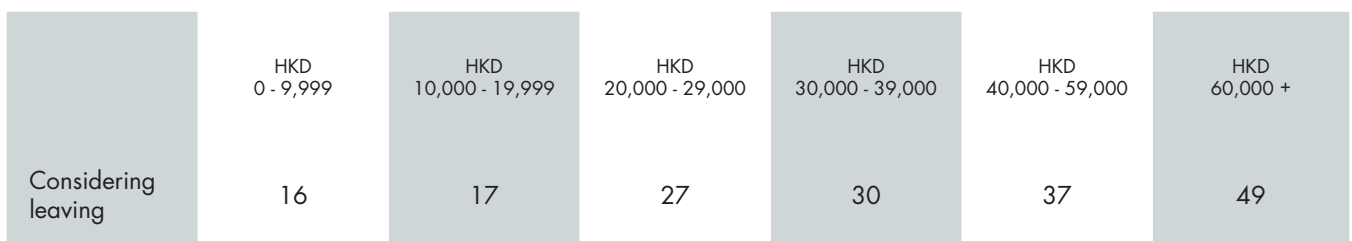
## Who's packing their bags?

Hong Kong's better-educated and wealthier citizens - those who are most important for Hong Kong's knowledge-based economy - are most likely to be considering leaving. The correlation with education is more pronounced than it was in 2008; percentages of the most educated categories have risen dramatically, while the percentage of people with 6 years or less of formal education considering leaving has actually fallen.

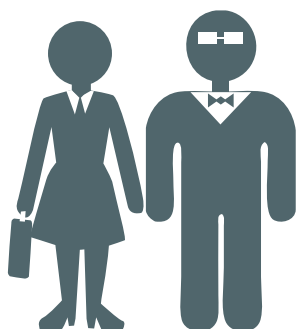
### Considered leaving Hong Kong (by education) 2010:



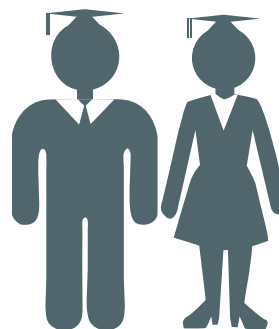
### Considered leaving Hong Kong (by income) 2010:



**Managers and Administrators**  
**42 %**



**Professionals and Associates**  
**38 %**



Who's not thinking of leaving?



**20 %**  
of smokers



**19 %**  
of retirees



**18 %**  
of those born on  
the mainland



**17 %**  
of those aged  
60-90

## 2. Mustn't grumble

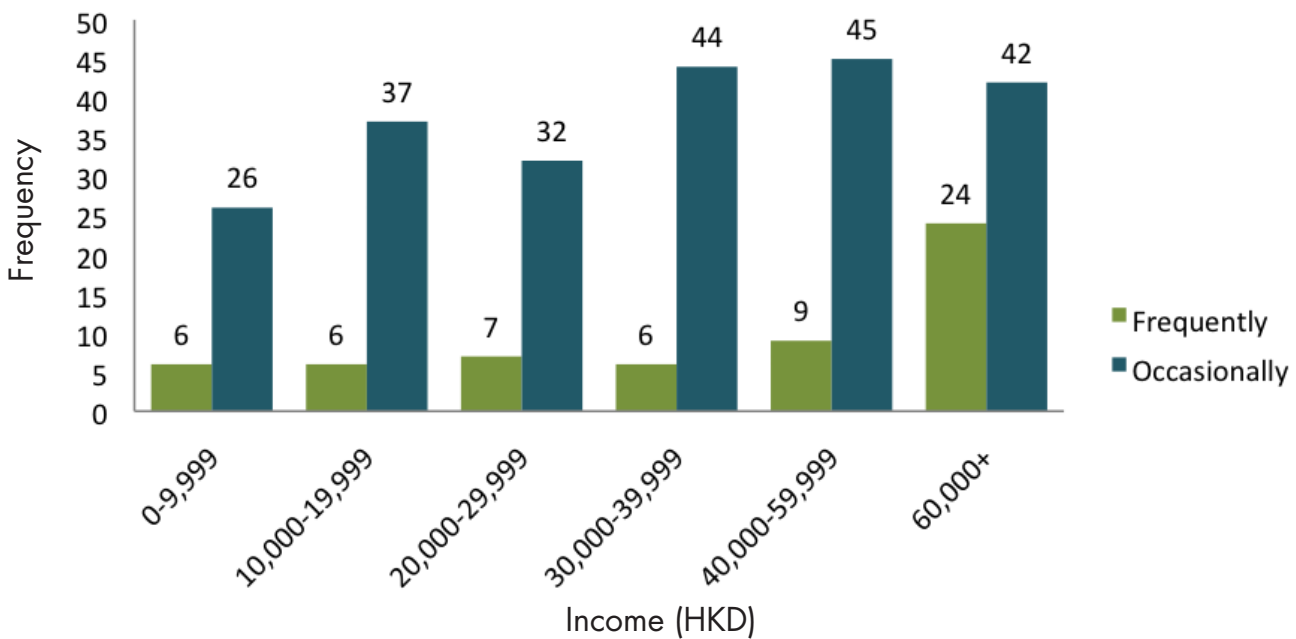
People are discussing air pollution less frequently than they were in 2008, with everyone: family, friends, the press and legislators.

**How frequently, if ever, have you complained about or discussed air pollution with:**

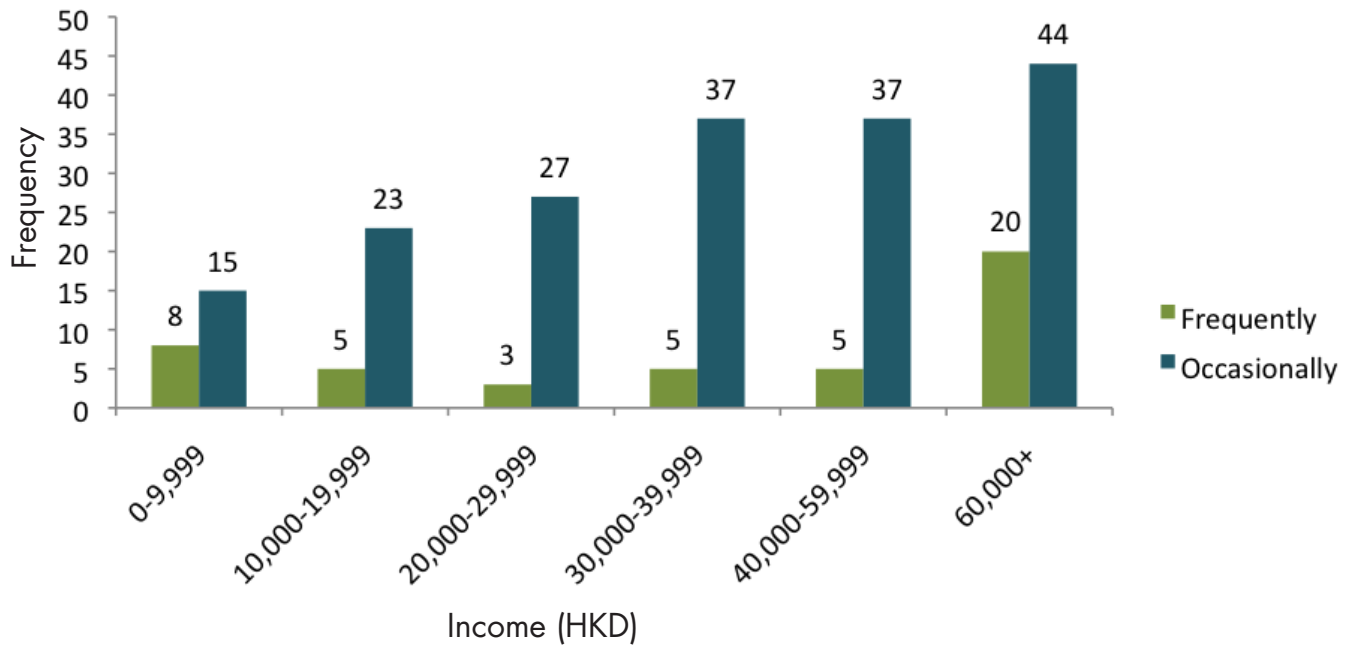
	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Chief Executive/other officials	-	1	2	97
Legco members	-	-	4	96
District Council members	1	4	6	89
Boss	2	5	4	89
Family	6	27	20	47
Friends & fellow workers	8	35	18	39

The people who are talking tend to be the ones with money. The more money you have, the more frequently you discuss air pollution with your family, your friends and coworkers, and your employer. The only people who bring up the issue with Legco members frequently appear to be the very rich.

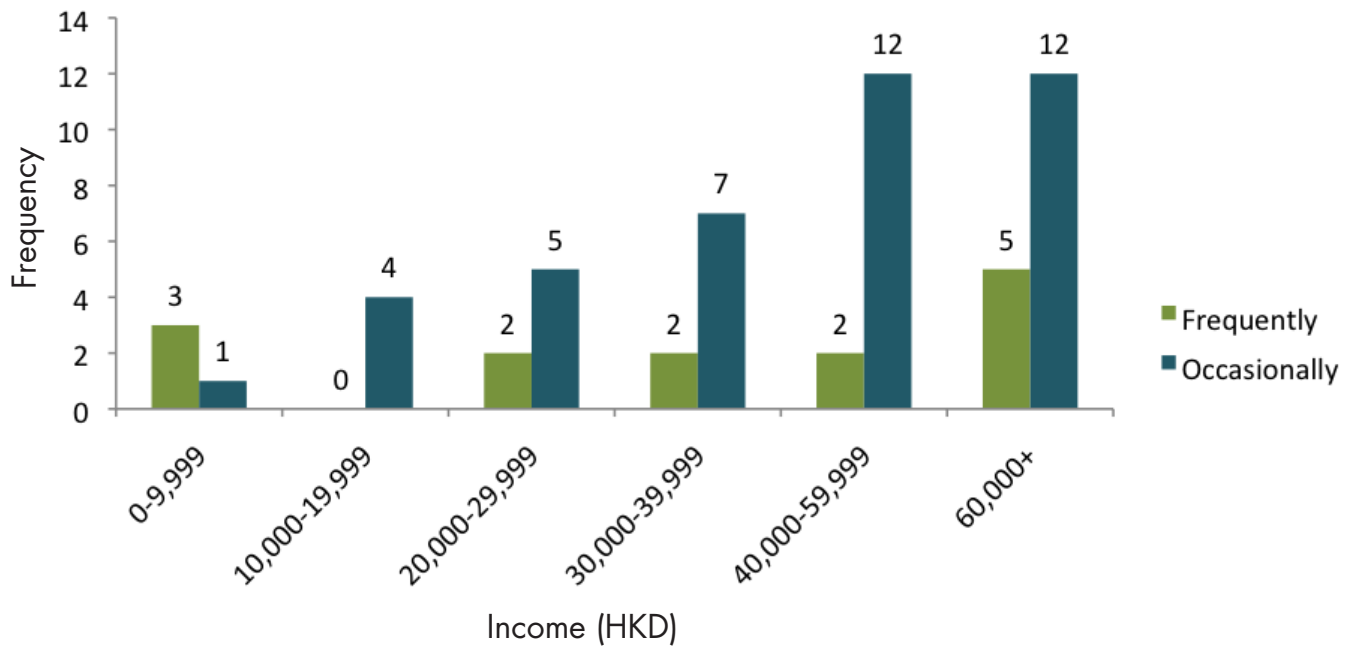
**Frequency of discussion with friends (by income) 2010:**



**Frequency of discussion with family (by income)2010:**



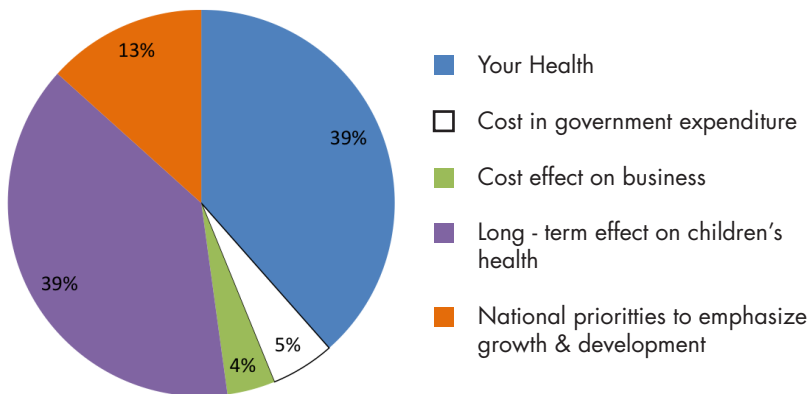
**Frequency of discussion with employers (by income) 2010:**



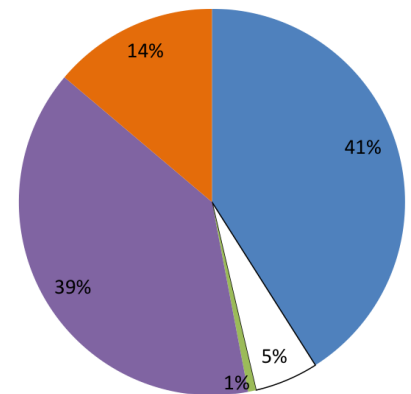
Smokers and their families are less likely than non-smokers to discuss air pollution with their friends.

### 3. The best intentions . . .

When it comes to what factors should be given greatest weight when setting policy, it appears that Hong Kong people believe their government has the right intentions.



**What government considers most important**



**What government SHOULD consider most important**

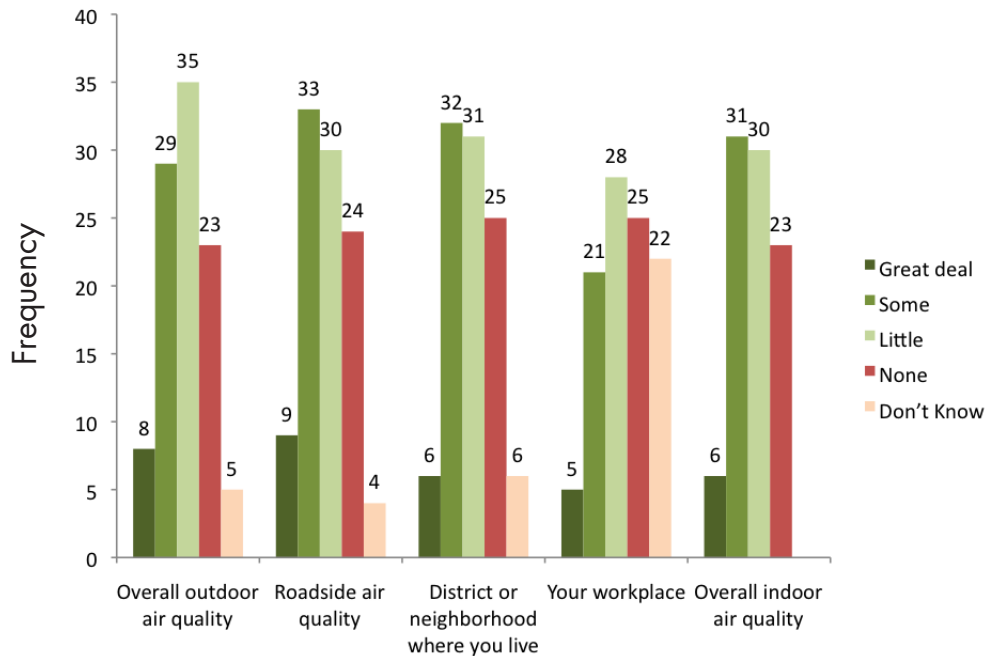
When asked in more detail, half of respondents thought government gave its own costs and national priorities 'some' consideration; just over a third of respondents thought business costs got 'some' consideration.

#### **Who believes that costs to business are an important factor in government decision-making?**

Women are more likely to believe so than men, by a 10% margin. Education seems to increase the belief slightly, while the older respondents were, the more doubts they had: 30% of those over 60 said they 'don't know'.

## 4. Doubts about execution

Hong Kong people believe their government shares the same concerns, yet when it comes to actually setting policy, one in five does not trust them at all to set and enforce air quality standards, and less than one in ten would trust them a great deal.



This distrust seems highest among public sector workers, and among managers and administrators. In both of these categories one respondent in three does not trust government to set or enforce standards for outdoor, roadside or district air pollution.

Information from the government is more trusted than distrusted. Greatest overall distrust fell upon friends and the internet, while most trusted were television and green groups.

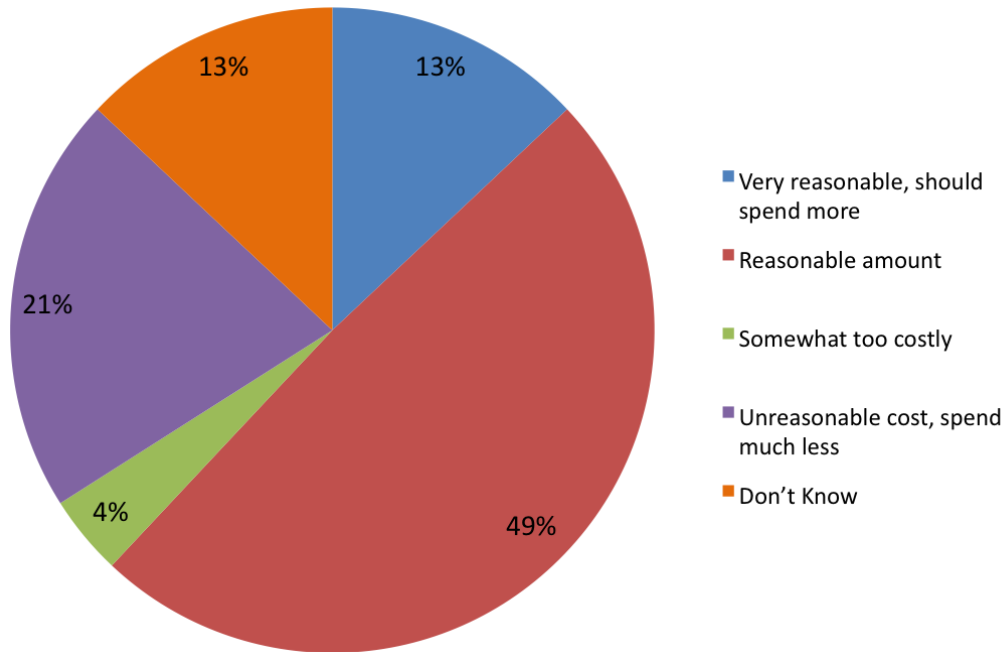
Great deal or some trust	Source	Little or no trust
70	TV	27
66	Newspapers	29
56	University	17
34	Friends	50
53	Government reports	33
69	Green Groups	21
29	Workplace	33
54	Government Departments	32
55	Environment Centres	21
37	Internet	38

Given the distrust among public sector and NGO workers in government policy, it is curious that they are most trusting of information from government departments (29% give them even great deal of trust), environmental information centres, and their workplaces. The internet provokes highly polarised views, with equal numbers trusting and distrusting it as a source.

## 5. Bearing the cost

We asked what people thought about the government’s proposed Phase 1 air pollution controls, which would cost about HK\$7 per person per month.

Do you think this is a reasonable or unreasonable amount to spend on lowering air pollution?



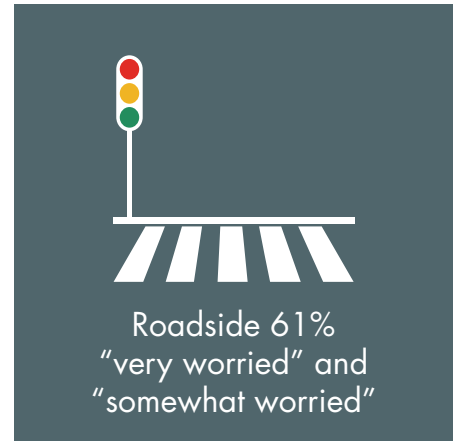
SPEND MORE	SPEND LESS
Richer	Poorer
Younger	Older
Students, Professionals and Associate Professionals	Housewives, Retirees

Older respondents were less approving of this expenditure, and richer respondents were more generous. Housewives and retirees do not approve, students and professionals do.

# 6. How do professional drivers feel about air pollution

When asked which sources of air pollution they thought were having the biggest impact on their health, professional drivers share the public's concern about roadside emissions, choosing traffic-related sources as their top four.

## What is bothering you

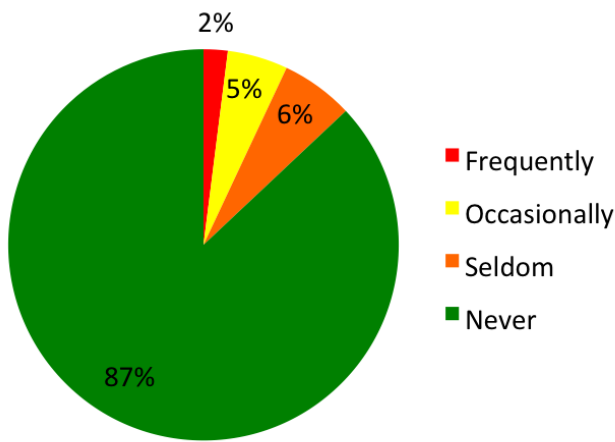


Professional drivers also worry about the lack of maintenance of their vehicles as much as they worry about the affects of air pollution.

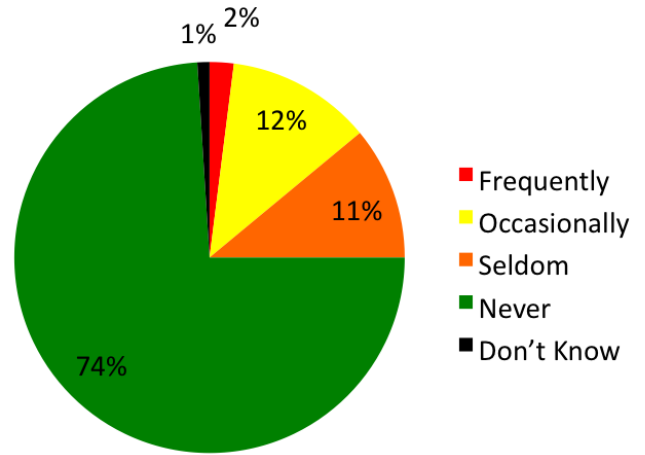


# 7. Professional drivers' symptoms

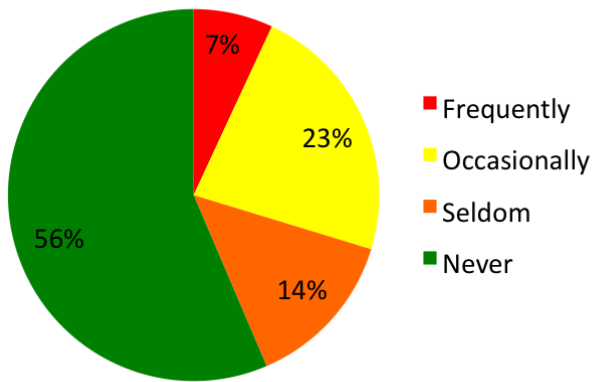
Professional drivers report serious effects from air pollution-related health problems at similar levels to the general public.



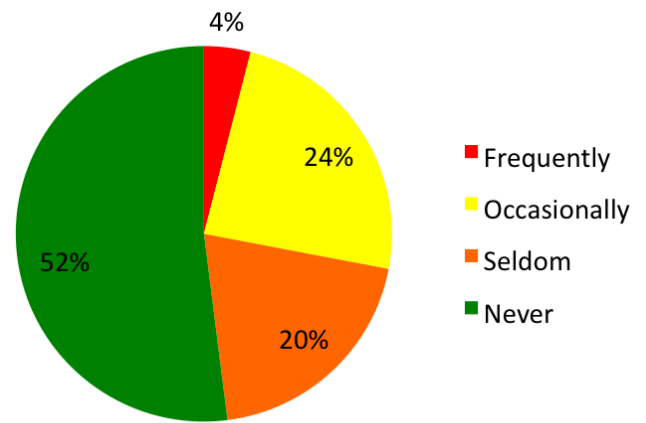
Asthma



Shortness of breath



Stringing eyes



Coughing and choking

Smokers and their families suffer more from shortness of breath, women suffer more from stinging eyes, people not born in Hong Kong or the mainland suffer more from coughing and choking, and all of these symptoms get worse with age, except for asthma, where more old people have frequent attacks, but more young people have rare and occasional attacks.

# The Bottom Line

The responses to this survey paint a bleak picture of Hong Kong, in which more and more people have given up complaining and started packing their bags. A problem that drives a quarter of the population to consider emigrating is truly staggering. It also appears that less talk and more action is what the public want from government. Hong Kong people feel that their government agrees with them on the priorities, i.e. protecting their health and their children's health, and they trust information from the government more than information from their friends or their employers. Government is therefore perceived as both well intentioned and reasonably well informed. However, a majority of people place little or no trust in government to set and enforce air quality standards, and there is strong opposition to government's recent proposals to spend money to tackle the problem. Professional drivers are both aware and concerned about the dangers of roadside pollution to their health, but are trapped and unable to leave due to lack of necessary resources.

## Survey methods and management

Mobile calling: 1,602 qualified respondents were identified (workers in transport industries, taxi, lorry, bus or van driver or driver of another kind of commercial vehicle such as a limousine, or employed on a ship or ferry). Of those, 942 began the survey for a contact rate of 58 percent. Of the 942 who began the survey, 385 completed it, for a completion rate of 41 percent.

Landline calling: 1,381 qualified respondents were identified (adults age 18 and up who are permanent residents of Hong Kong). Of those, 819 began the survey for a contact rate of 59 percent. Of the 819 who began the survey, 600 completed it, for a completion rate of 73 percent.

All numbers are percentages unless otherwise indicated and all percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number following WAPOR and AAPOR guidelines.

The survey questionnaire was designed by Michael DeGolyer, Christine Loh, Yanyan Yip and Cheung Pui Ki. The project was managed by Cheung Pui Ki, with statistical analysis by Michael DeGolyer. This project was commissioned by Civic Exchange.

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the opinions of Civic Exchange.

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