

International Coastal Cleanup 2009 Hong Kong

Executive Summary

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Initiated by Ocean Conservancy (OC) in 1986, the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) engages the public to remove trash and debris from the world's beaches and waterways and then record the types of debris found. Data from cleanups is recorded through a network of local coordinators around the world and collated by OC, with the aim of identifying the major causes of marine debris. OC then compiles the data from all international ICC Coordinators and analyses it to identify the major sources of debris and the activities that contribute to it. The final information is then used to educate the public, business, industry and government authorities about the problem, on the basis that understanding the problem is the key to finding long-lasting solutions.

This global volunteer project brings together a large number of people from all walks of life. Through their involvement participants develop a sense of awareness and responsibility for the marine pollution problem and work to encourage others to change the behavioural patterns that cause this pollution.

A total of 2,596 volunteers participated in the Hong Kong ICC 2009, collecting 7086.01kg of debris at 65 separate cleanups at 43 sites (32 of which were held in gazetted beaches managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department) from 19 September to 13 November 2009.

The most common items collected this year were pieces of broken glass (typically glass bottles), while Styrofoam plastic boxes (pieces) and plastic bags were the second and third most collected items. Cigarettes and cigarette filters ranked fourth. For the most part, eight of the top ten types of debris originated from irresponsible shoreline and recreational activities.

Marine Debris is yet another stress on an ocean already beleaguered by many other human-caused stresses including coastal development, pollution, overfishing, and now climate change. As the engine that drives our planet's climate, the ocean is on the frontline of climate change. It absorbs half of the carbon dioxide (CO₂) we've pumped into the sky from the burning of fossil fuels and most of the extra heat produced by the greenhouse effect. The ocean is the unsung hero in this battle but it is also its most vulnerable victim.

Top Ten Debris in Hong Kong ICC 2009:

| Top Ten types of debris in Hong Kong 2009 | | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Rank | Total Number | Debris Items | Percentage |
| 1 | 16,178 | Broken Glass | 24.23% |
| 2 | 8,921 | Styrofoam Plastic Boxes | 13.36% |
| 3 | 4,459 | Bags (Plastic) | 6.68% |
| 4 | 3,716 | Cigarettes/Cigarette Filters | 5.56% |
| 5 | 3,094 | Beverage Bottles (Glass) | 4.63% |
| 6 | 2,771 | Candles | 4.15% |
| 7 | 2,769 | Beverage Bottles (Plastic) < 2 liters | 4.15% |
| 8 | 2,718 | Cups, Plates, Forks, Knives, Spoons | 4.07% |
| 9 | 2,598 | Food Wrappers/Containers | 3.89% |
| 10 | 2,560 | Caps, Lids | 3.83% |

General Findings:

The prevalence of litter associated with recreational use at beaches and waterways (especially beverage containers, candles, food and drink packaging, cigarettes and cigarette filters) indicates that our citizens are suffering from severe “pick-up-after-me” syndrome. Hong Kong citizens have developed the bad habit of expecting the public rubbish collection system to ‘pick-up after’ them both on land and at sea. This problem is most obvious following special events and public holidays, particularly after the Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day.

Broken pieces of glass (mostly from glass bottle) make up over 20% of the total amount of marine debris collected this year. This is the second year that broken glass ranks as the No.1 source of marine debris. Although a trade-funded voluntary Glass Container Recycling Programme for the Hotel Sector was launched in November 2008, the problem of waste glass still persists. This needs to be resolved with a more effective recycling and education programme.

With ‘disposable cups, plates, forks, knives and spoons’ regularly appearing in the top ten for many years, it seems that Hong Kong citizens are not prepared to clean up after themselves. This has a disastrous effect on the marine environment. We hope that people will become much more aware about the problem their litter creates and, if they must use disposable cutlery, then they dispose of it appropriately.

Cigarettes and cigarette filters have been in the top ten debris list for 19 years running. Obviously, smokers have not been disposing of their filters appropriately and have been smoking in non-smoking areas. Compared to last year’s results, the

number of cigarettes and cigarette filters collected has risen by more than 1,000. It appears that Hong Kong citizens have not realized that, since the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance enacted on 1 January 2007, beaches are now designated non-smoking areas.

Conclusion:

The ICC is an activity that primarily focuses on raising awareness of the coastal and marine pollution problem in order to bring about changes for the benefit of coastal and marine ecosystems. However, the data collected provides much more than just statistics on the debris found and its origin, it reflects society's poor level of understanding of its responsibility towards environmental protection and pollution control. The pollution of our coasts and oceans mirrors the general patterns of solid waste disposal on land and from ships. Therefore, the results obtained from the ICC can be used as a barometer to measure a society's general behaviour towards nature and environmental protection.

Based on the data collected, our conclusions for Hong Kong are that coastal and marine pollution is not caused by foreign negligence, or one single sector of our society. The data shows that coastal and marine pollution originates from shoreline activities, confirming that it is primarily a local problem. The data also indicates that the problem is due to the negligence and carelessness of mainly individuals but also companies and factories. This highlights that a lot more needs to be done by interest groups but also the government to educate the Hong Kong public to understand its role, impact and responsibility towards the environment both on collective and individual levels.

Our motto is "conservation begins with education" as education goes a long way towards improving society's general behaviour towards the environment. Targeted and specific public campaigns should be launched and maintained for an extensive period by the government in conjunction with interest groups. Stronger legislation and enforcement is also needed. Existing laws must be improved and enforced to discourage the careless behaviour that leads to the types of litter pollution we have reported.

The ICC is an essential and effective weapon in the global fight against coastal and marine pollution. The Hong Kong ICC is growing in public profile each year and is facilitating more and more cleanup events every year, yet still needs more participants. More volunteers are needed to help with the strenuous but rewarding work of removing the large quantities of debris found on the beaches every year. In addition, the more people involved in the cleanup means that more people witness

the seriousness of the issue and promote awareness of this to their friends and families. It is also important for schools to see this activity as an opportunity to teach their students about social and environmental responsibility. More support from the media would help raise the profile of the event even further. The success of this event highly depends on its exposure to the public, and we need to find more ways of reaching out to a greater audience. On a logistical level, our COs should be aware of our guidelines so that they submit data properly and promptly. Finally, we think the event would benefit from new and creative ideas that raise the degree of enthusiasm among COs and volunteers.