



International Coastal Cleanup 2010 suggests the message on plastic bags is not getting through

Record number of volunteers' team up to remove more than eight tons of garbage from Hong Kong's beaches, suggesting there is still work to do get the environmental message across

This year's International Coastal Cleanup has starkly revealed how efforts to raise environmental awareness among Hong Kong people have not succeeded in changing irresponsible behaviour. Broken glass was again top of the list of items collected this year, followed by plastic bags, up from third last year. The percentage of plastic bags as a proportion of total refuse collected was also higher, suggesting that the plastic bag levy may not be the only way to reduce the environmental impact of plastic bags. Other items collected included plastic beverage bottles, styrofoam boxes, food containers, disposable eating utensils and cigarette butts. Overall results suggest that many beachgoers remain as inconsiderate as ever in terms of cleaning up after themselves.

International Coastal Cleanup (ICC)

The International Coastal Cleanup is an annual event coordinated by the Green Council. The 2010 event took place between 18 September and 12 November. 17 schools and 42 companies teamed up with non-government organisations, community groups and individuals to field a record 2,900 volunteers for 69 cleanups at 45 sites. They removed over 8.1 tons of refuse from Hong Kong's shorelines.

"While we were pleased by the record number of volunteers at this year's event, the results show that there is still a good deal of work to do," said Linda Ho, Chief Executive Officer of the Green Council. "Marine debris, ranging from used shopping bags to abandoned fishing nets, is one of the most widespread environmental problems, threatening marine ecosystems, coastal economies, wildlife and human health. The ocean makes up nearly 71 per cent of our planet's surface and provides 99 per cent of the Earth's living space, which is the largest space in our universe known to support life. The ocean is also the forefront of climate change, capturing carbon dioxide and generating oxygen from microscopic organisms. Wherever we live, our lives depend on the ocean, which provides us with the food, water and oxygen we need to survive. Polluting it is sheer madness. We urgently need to do more to educate people on the damage they do by leaving litter in coastal areas, and step up our efforts to encourage people to reduce and recycle it instead."

Top 10 marine debris collected

Broken glass remained the most common type of litter collected, making up around 18 per cent of the total collection in term of the number of fragments collected. As well as the ecological hazards, this also carries an obvious risk of injury to the general public, underlining the urgency of introducing a comprehensive glass recycling programme in Hong Kong. At present, only a voluntary, self-funded scheme exists in the hotel industry, and the portion of glass collected for recycling is a tiny fraction of glass products consumed.



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The proportion of plastic bags collected has increased from 4.7 per cent of total refuse in 2008 to 9.3 per cent this year. There has also been an increase in volume terms: almost 5,700 plastic bags were collected this year, up from over 4,000 in 2008. While some of this increase can be attributed to the increase in clean-up volunteers, the numbers suggest that the government's plastic bag levy, introduced in July 2009 has not yet had any effect on Hong Kong's coastal environment.

"The Marine Debris Report 2010 from Ocean Conservancy indicated that around 60-80 per cent of marine litter starts out on land. It revealed that the effectiveness of waste management strategies are key issues to tackling this problem," added Ho. "Prevention of littering through better enforcement is certainly one area in which we would like the government to be doing more, but more support for recycling must be provided. Relying on landfill is not a sustainable waste disposal strategy in the long-term. Local environmental NGOs play an important role in educating and persuading Hong Kong people that it is in everyone's interest to conserve our marine environment."

Top ten debris types collected during ICC 2010 Hong Kong summarized below:

Rank	Total number	Debris Items	Percentage
1	11,274	Broken glass	18.49%
2	5,682	Plastic bags	9.32%
3	5,030	Large-size beverage bottles (plastic)	8.25%
4	4,984	Styrofoam boxes	8.17%
5	4,483	Food wrappers/containers	7.35%
6	3,837	Caps, lids	6.29%
7	3,639	Cigarettes/cigarette filters	5.97%
8	3,038	Disposable cutlery (e.g. plastic forks, knives, spoons)	4.98%
9	1,976	Straws, stirrers	3.24%
10	1,590	Candles	2.61%

General Findings from the result of ICC this year :

1. Broken glass (mostly from glass bottles) is continuously found to be the most abundant marine debris from 2008 to 2010 in Hong Kong. The reason for this is likely to be piecemeal and inadequate recycling of glassware and glass containers in Hong Kong.
2. Candles were in the top ten list of debris again, indicating a low level of public awareness on the need to be responsible for the waste caused by festival celebrations such as the mid-autumn festival and national day.
3. The number of plastic bags collected increased compared to 2008 (i.e. before the plastic bag levy came into force). Insufficient support for the recycling industry and insufficient provision of public recycling facilities is one of the reasons for this increase.

4. With disposable plastic plates and cutlery in the top ten of many years, it appears that Hong Kong people are still not prepared to clean up after themselves.
5. Nine of the top ten types of debris collected this year stem from shoreline and recreational activities. Citizens who take part in such activities need to be reminded that they are responsible for disposing of their rubbish in an appropriate and legal way.

Suggestions:

- There needs to be better co-ordination between government departments to prevent rubbish from ending up in the sea. Currently, a number of different departments – the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) – are responsible for cleaning up litter in their own designated areas. However, debris and litter flow through the environment from land to water and back without regard for these jurisdictional boundaries. Overall strategies are needed.
- The relevant authorities, including AFCD, EPD, FEHD, Housing Department (HD), Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), LCSD and Marine Department (MD) should ensure better enforcement of legislation on littering in public places.
- The relevant authorities, including The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), AFCD, EPD and HKPF should ensure better enforcement of legislation on dumping construction waste, with particular attention to construction sites that are close to waterways.
- The relevant government authorities should ensure that any commissioned cleaners carry out their beach cleaning activities effectively, particularly in popular, hidden and unseen areas.
- The EPD, FEHD, LCSD and HKPF should collaborate to minimise the generation of waste before, during and after any festivals, holidays or events. The EPD should educate the public on how to have a "green" festival.
- Public education campaigns should highlight the consequences of littering, including the fact that litter dropped on land ends up in the sea, causing damage in a number of different ways.
- As a large quantity of recyclable plastic products (e.g. plastic bottles, bags, cans, caps, etc.) has been collected during the cleanups, arrangements should be made by the appropriate authorities to recycle these materials, and to make it easier for citizens to do so.
- A recycling programme for glass bottles should urgently be developed and promoted, including establishing glass recycling collection boxes and providing funds to recycling companies for this purpose.



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