



International Coastal Cleanup 2011 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. Plastic bags were at top of the list of items collected this year, followed by Styrofoam. 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, food containers, cigarette butts and glow sticks. 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 2011 event took place between 17 September and 11 November. 17 schools and 42 companies teamed up with non-government organisations, community groups and individuals to field a record 14,000 volunteers for 67 cleanups at 43 sites. They removed over 57,000kg 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

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 plastic recycling programme in Hong Kong.



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The proportion of plastic bags collected has increased from 4.7 per cent of total refuse in 2008 to 12.5 per cent this year. There has also been an increase in volume terms: more than 7,600 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 and citizen's plastic consumption habits.

"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 2011 Hong Kong summarized below:

Rank	Debris Items	Total number	Percentage
1	Plastic bags	7,645	12.5%
2	Styrofoam Pieces	5,883	9.62%
3	Plastic Sheets/Material	4,468	7.31%
4	Plastic Bottles (less than 2L)	3,989	6.52%
5	Food wrappers/containers	3,883	6.27%
6	Caps, lids	3,424	5.60%
7	Glass Bottles	3,288	5.38%
8	Cigarettes/cigarette filters	3,036	4.97%
9	Construction Waste	2,857	4.67%
10	Fishing Equipment/Glow-sticks	2,759	4.51%

General Findings from the result of ICC this year :

1. 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. The younger generation of environmental awareness is weak, and lack of public recycling facilities, are all leading to the reasons for increase in the number of plastic bags.
2. Discarded cigarettes and cigarette butts seized this year have increased dramatically. Proportional improvements have been made over the year. This is perhaps a result of increased tobacco taxes thus reduced the number of smokers. However, cigarettes/cigarette butts have been included in twenty-one consecutive Top Ten beach garbage results. According to the Hong Kong Open University students in their report, the information provided shows that most people still do not know that smoking is prohibited in the beach. This leads to a large number of cigarette smokers that continue to throw their cigarettes on the beach despite of .



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3. This year construction waste have made the top ten list, with 2,857 pieces compared to 1,237 pieces last year, more than double! Construction waste collected in Sandy Bay, accounted for more than 25 per cent of total construction waste on Hong Kong's shorelines. This may partly be due to the MTR West Island Line Project, and perhaps continue to increase near site works.
4. This year ocean and water activities generated 10 per cent more waste than last year. In particular plastic canvas from sails, fishing equipment, glow sticks entered the top ten.
5. From top ten beach garbage, five of them are from coastal or recreational activities discarded waste. The public must be reminded that they should clean up after activities and dispose of properly in allocated garbage and recycling disposals.

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 minimize 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.



