

**Report on the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC)**

**Hong Kong 2003**

**by**

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*“It was around mid-day on a Saturday. We caught a junk boat that was generously donated for our use by a prominent Hong Kong financial trading company with about 30 of us on board. Food was also thoughtfully donated by a newly-opened pizza restaurant and drinks were also wonderfully given to us for free by a company which manufactures a famous Asian beer brand. We left Queen’s ferry pier in Central and made our way to the southern coast of Lamma Island. Once on the beach, we all donned our gloves and armed with a black plastic garbage bag each, proceeded to pick up the rubbish carelessly strewn along the beach. A few hours later, the bags were filled and so were the data cards. We then made our way back on the boat, with a sense of fulfilment for a job well done. “*

## INTRODUCTION

The above quote is a typical scenario from the experience of a participant of the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) in Hong Kong, which also takes place on the same day every year throughout the world. Nowadays, it does not only take place on various beaches, but on various bodies of water, both on land and underneath the water as well. Littering and dumping rubbish into our oceans, seas and other bodies of water are age-old problems that have been around for as long as humans have been. However, before the Industrial Revolution, most trash came from organic materials that readily biodegraded naturally. But today, synthetic and durable elements like plastics are the primary substances in trash. These items stay intact for centuries, and many are buoyant, allowing them to travel in currents for thousands of miles, endangering ocean ecosystems and wildlife along the way.

## INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP (ICC)

The first documented mass beach cleanup was organized in the United States by the Center for Environmental Education (now known as The Ocean Conservancy, or OC) on the shores of South Padre Island, Texas, the USA in 1986. Since this first mass organized cleanup, more and more participants have been getting involved every year. In 1989, the event became inaugurated as the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) and by 2002, 100 nations were recorded as taking part, which was an all-time high since the launch of the ICC.

In addition to this increased participation, the total amount of trash collected and number of beaches cleaned has risen as well. In the past 17 years, the original 2,800 volunteers have grown to a cumulative total of 5.2 million. From 1986 to 2002, the ICC removed 89 million pounds of marine debris from over 130 000 miles of shoreline, which is five times the circumference of the globe. In Hong Kong, the number of participants rose from 439 in 1999 to 2,224 in 2003. From 1999 to 2003, we had collected a cumulative total of 209 138 pounds of debris, and covered 86 miles of shoreline (both on land and underwater) (see Table 1).

The ICC continues to grow for a number of reasons – the inclusion of underwater cleanups, expansion of cleanup efforts inland to streams, lakes, and rivers, and the unfortunate fact that marine debris continues to be a global threat. Consequently, the cleanups increase volunteers’ education on the debris issue every year, alerting people to the magnitude of the problem, triggering new ideas for workable solutions, and spreading interest, enthusiasm, and dedication to keeping waterways clean.

Today, the ICC is held annually around every major body of water in the world. In addition to being the largest single-day volunteer event for the marine environment (held every third Saturday in September), the ICC is unique and effective because of its data collection (relative to other cleanup campaigns). The ICC strives to trace pollution at its source, identifying the activities that cause pollution, thus trying to prevent it. The Ocean Conservancy (OC) now focuses on the activities that cause the debris. The OC compiles, analyses, and tracks this data year-by-year and site-to-site in order to identify the activities and general sources of the debris in a region, state, or country. The final information is then used as a tool to educate the public, business, industry, and government officials about the problem of waste in marine and coastal environments. The annual ICC data reports have

also influenced public policy on waste management, prompted legislation, and convinced individuals, organizations, and communities to examine their waste handling practices.

## METHODOLOGY

Based on the contact lists from the previous years along with some additional contacts, invitation letters had been sent by email, fax and/or post to schools, companies, non-governmental organizations and government departments soliciting interest in getting them to organize group cleanups from 8 June 2003 until the actual cleanup day on 20 September. Reminder emails and faxes were re-sent in early August. Upon receiving the replies from the cleanup organizers, an ICC package (including posters, ICC data cards in English and/or Chinese versions, ICC pamphlets, *Coastal Connection* [ICC newsletter, see Appendix II], *Pocket Guide to Marine Debris*, ICC certificate [see Appendix II], and a document entitled “How to organize a cleanup” [see Appendix II] where necessary) were also sent out. After the confirmation of the cleanup venue, date, times and estimated number of participants, arrangements with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) for the provision of gloves, garbage bags and the collection of debris after the cleanup were made immediately. If the cleanups were going to be held in the gazetted beaches, applications for the permits from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) had to be written prior to the days of the cleanup. Follow-up phone calls to the LCSD were made in order to ensure the cleanup organizers had the approval from the department for their cleanups in the gazetted beaches.

After the ICC, filled data cards were received by post or fax from the cleanup organizers batch by batch. Follow-up phone calls were also made in order to remind those cleanup organizers who had not returned the filled data cards from late-September to the submission date of the data (on 14 November 2003). Data were then inputted and processed using the ICC results spreadsheet provided by the OC upon the receipt of each set of filled data cards. A summary of the results, the sponsor list (including sponsors and partners), People, Pounds, and Miles (PPM) report, media information list (see Appendix I) and photographs taken by the participants were submitted to the OC by email on 14 November while the zone-site list was sent to the OC by email on 28 October. It was originally to be sent one week after the cleanup, but the last cleanup was held on 25 October.

## RESULTS

This year, a total number of 17 cleanup organizers participated the ICC in Hong Kong, involving 2,224 volunteers and 21 sites (see Table 1 & 2; and Zone-Site List in Appendix I). Similar to the previous years, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) contributed a lot in being the head cleanup organizer, running large-scale cleanups in their marine parks, namely Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park, Yan Chau Tong Marine Park and Tung Ping Chau Marine Park. Upon the AFCD's request, a portable document format (pdf) file of the ICC Certificate was sent to the AFCD from the OC on 29 October because the AFCD wanted to produce 600 certificates, one for each participant in the cleanups. Also, the Hong Kong Underwater Association also played an important role in getting SCUBA divers to carry out their underwater cleanup at Sharp Island (see Appendix II). For the cleanup at Waterfall Bay, a journalist from the South China Morning Post Education section interviewed the ICC participants on 20 September (see Appendix II).

Compared with the “Top Ten” debris collected (in terms of numbers for both land and underwater cleanups) in Hong Kong in 2002 (Table 2), food wrappers and containers were the number one item found (number four last year) while beverage cans were the number two item in 2003 (number seven in 2002) (see Table 3). The number one item in 2002, bags, came fourth among the “Top Ten” items this year. Most of the debris (eight of the “Top Ten” items) found during the ICC was produced from shoreline and recreational activities. There were more than 45 different kinds of peculiar items identified during the cleanups, some of which included candles, hypodermic syringes and clinical masks as something we definitely should pay attention to, for obvious health and safety reasons.

## CONCLUSION

All in all, the ICC in 2003 proved to be a good success in Hong Kong. Seventeen cleanup organizers were coordinated from mid-September to late-October to organize their cleanups, involving 2,224 volunteers, collecting 30 430 pounds of marine debris, and cleaning 10.8 miles of coastline. Despite this success, we still expect the ICC in 2004 (which will be held on 18 and 19 September 2004) to have an even better participation and an increased popularity in our community.

## DISCUSSION

The level of participation was good, but it was not surprising that the cleanups in the gazetted beaches collected a relatively little amount of debris because the government has spent more resources on cleaning them. To reduce injury risk to the participants (especially for children younger than 10 years old) and to ensure the efficient management of the beach environment by the cleaning contractors of the (LCSD), the gazetted beaches were the selected choices for cleanups for some associations (e.g. Hong Kong Girl Guides Association, Junior Police Call and the Scout Association of Hong Kong). As the gazetted beaches were relatively clean, the participants actually expressed disappointment that there were not more litter for them to collect.

Hong Kong's beaches have a number of peculiar items that are perhaps prevalent here than elsewhere in the world. These include candles, hypodermic syringes and clinical face masks. For next year, these items should be placed to the category of "Local Items of Concern" in the data card. In fact, candles and their remains have been noticed for a few years because of their increasing abundance, especially after the Mid-Autumn Festival. People usually leave the candles and their remains after the enjoyment of using the lanterns and candles during the festivities. On the other hand, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak from early-2003 to mid-2003 greatly increased the public awareness of personal and public hygiene. As a result, clinical face masks were widely used and abandoned by local people. As for hypodermic syringes, most of these are considered to come from medical waste.

There were two cleanup organizers that did not return the filled data cards resulting in two sets of data that were missing. In addition, four cleanup organizers did not use the data cards correctly so that only the total weights of all marine debris were recorded rather than for each item specifically. Fortunately, the data obtained were still meaningful and useful for future analyses.

For more detailed information about the ICC and the OC, see [www.oceanconservancy.org](http://www.oceanconservancy.org).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

All cleanup organizers require additional reminders to complete the data cards for recording data and return their filled data cards well before late-October in order to facilitate the data analysis. Any cleanup that is to be carried out in any of the gazetted beaches must complete an application for a permit from the LCSD at least one week before the cleanup.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thanks should be addressed to the FEHD (especially Mr. Tak-man Ng) and the LCSD for their continuing support to Civic Exchange's Clean Environment Campaign. Also, a big thank you to all the cleanup organizers and volunteers for their efforts and enthusiasm in participating in the ICC in 2003.

## TABLES

Table 1 - Number of participants, pounds and miles of the ICC in Hong Kong from 1999 to 2003

| Year  | Number of Organizers | Cleanup Participants | Pounds  | Miles |
|-------|----------------------|----------------------|---------|-------|
| 1999  | --                   | 439                  | 31,123  | 3.50  |
| 2000  | --                   | 851                  | 56,595  | 8.47  |
| 2001  | 12                   | 2,372                | 65,115  | 53.10 |
| 2002  | 10                   | 1,960                | 25,875  | 10.10 |
| 2003  | 17                   | 2,224                | 30,430  | 10.83 |
| Total | 39                   | 7,846                | 209,138 | 86.00 |

Table 2 - Top ten items of debris in Hong Kong in 2002

| Debris Items                          | Total Number | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Bags                                  | 1,771        | 10.5%      |
| Caps, Lids                            | 1,480        | 8.8%       |
| Cups, Plates, Forks, Knives, Spoons   | 1,473        | 8.7%       |
| Food Wrappers / Containers            | 1,441        | 8.6%       |
| Beverage Bottles (Plastic) ≤ 2 litres | 1,234        | 7.3%       |
| Foamed Plastic Fish Boxes (Pieces)    | 1,219        | 7.2%       |
| Beverage Cans                         | 914          | 5.4%       |
| Beverage Bottles (Glass)              | 827          | 4.9%       |
| Rope                                  | 727          | 4.3%       |
| Straws, Stirrers                      | 657          | 3.9%       |

Table 3 - Top ten items of debris in Hong Kong in 2003

| Debris Items                          | Total Number | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Food Wrappers / Containers            | 4,770        | 17.5%      |
| Beverage Cans                         | 3,330        | 12.2%      |
| Cigarettes / Cigarette Filters        | 2,129        | 7.8%       |
| Bags                                  | 1,797        | 6.6%       |
| Straws, Stirrers                      | 1,765        | 6.5%       |
| Beverage Bottles (Glass)              | 1,600        | 5.9%       |
| Cups, Plates, Forks, Knives, Spoons   | 1,563        | 5.7%       |
| Caps, Lids                            | 1,429        | 5.3%       |
| Beverage Bottles (Plastic) ≤ 2 litres | 1,414        | 5.2%       |
| Plastic Sheeting / Tarps              | 1,310        | 4.8%       |

Table 4 - List of the cleanup organizers (in alphabetical order), with the total number of participants and weight of debris collected

| Name of the Cleanup Organizers                     | Number of Participants | Weight of Debris Collected (kg) |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department | 823                    | 9,200                           |
| Chinese International School                       | 17                     | 276.8                           |
| Cub Scouts of America – Pack 1                     | 143                    | 1,363.6                         |
| Etrade Securities                                  | 30                     | No data                         |
| German-Swiss International School                  | 25                     | 120                             |
| Green Peng Chau Association                        | 162                    | 130                             |
| Hong Kong Girl Guides Association                  | 112                    | 372.2                           |
| Hong Kong International School                     | 37                     | 22.7                            |
| Hong Kong Underwater Association                   | 400                    | 1,180                           |
| Junior Police Call                                 | 133                    | 46.82                           |
| Kennedy School                                     | 70                     | 45                              |
| King George V School                               | 60                     | 150                             |
| Phoenix International School                       | 60                     | 150                             |
| Rowers / Outrigger Canoe Group                     | 25                     | 300                             |
| Scout Association of Hong Kong                     | 84                     | 14.55                           |
| Sear Rogers International School                   | 68                     | 510                             |
| The French Chamber of Commerce & Industry          | 35                     | 100                             |
| Total  | 2,224                  | 13,832                          |



## PHOTO GALLERY

Photos showing the cleanup by the Scout Association of Hong Kong at Golden Beach on 20 September, 2003.





Photos showing the cleanup by Sear Rogers International School at Shiu Hau Beach, Lantau Island on 30 September, 2003.



Photos showing the cleanup by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department at Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park on 20 September, 2003.

