

slash



The International Coastal Cleanup: Giving “Trash Day” Meaning Year-round



Volunteers with the Northwest Pacific Action Plan put their muscle into the International Coastal Cleanup at Sumawan Beach in Lianyungang City, China.

Not long before the 26th International Coastal Cleanup in September, Ocean Conservancy conservation biologist and marine debris specialist Nick Mallos had a significant chance encounter with a sea lion at a wharf in Santa Cruz, California. Ocean trash—what seemed to be a rubber packing strap—encircled the sea lion’s neck, cutting into her skin and clearly affecting her health. Mallos called in a local marine mammal rescue team. “It brought home why we do the work we do. When we clean up, or prevent dangerous items from getting in the water in the first place, there’s no question we’re protecting the wildlife that lives there.”

BY CATHERINE CLARKE FOX

For the last quarter of a century, Cleanup volunteers organized by a dedicated network of coordinators 140-strong have cleaned up and counted everything imaginable along the world’s shorelines inland and along the sea, from cigarette butts and bottle caps to the proverbial kitchen sink. This year, hundreds of thousands of people at more than 6,000 sites across the globe shared the one-of-a-kind International Coastal Cleanup experience. Here are just a few highlights:

• **Washington, D.C.** Ocean Conservancy’s flagship event at Anacostia Park showed the collaborative spirit and broad appeal of the Cleanup, bringing out a crowd of nearly 200 that included Ocean Conservancy staff and folks from local schools and communities along with partners including the Anacostia Watershed Society, the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Coca-Cola Company, Booz Allen Hamilton and the Dow Chemical Company. When the volunteers had filled the huge dumpster with more than 2 tons of trash, partner Covanta Energy hauled it away to burn it and generate electricity.

• **Maryland** Ocean Conservancy President and CEO Vikki Spruill joined Cleanup partner Bank of America on the Patapsco River, where huge amounts of debris including toilet seats and tires had traveled downstream from Pennsylvania following a series of intense storms including Hurricane Irene. Spruill, who pulled a blue swimming-pool slide out of the water, spoke with Cleanup volunteers and a local TV crew about the challenges posed when trash travels during storms.

• **South Africa** Charlotte Meyer, our long-time director of planned giving, found a Cleanup event while on vacation. “Port Elizabeth had their largest turnout, including more than 500 schoolchildren from the Nelson Mandela school district, many of whom had never seen the ocean. At 6 a.m. the beaches were full of litter, and by noon they were pristine. It was a beautiful day, and afterward the children frolicked in the water.”

• **Bali** During Bali’s first-ever International Coastal Cleanup, seven local organizations helped support 195 volunteers who cleaned 5.2 miles of beach in 90 minutes. They collected 6,771 items at Seminyak Beach on the ocean and along the Petanu River.

• **Norway** This country’s first Cleanup drew 2,000 people to 168 sites. “Norway has been through a traumatic summer with the Utøya killings,” says Emily Robertson of Keep Norway Clean, who led the Cleanup there.

“People are very motivated to do something together to contribute to society. The Cleanup is a perfect event—it is fun and contributes to a serious environmental issue in a very positive way.”

• **Hawaii** More than 40 personnel from the Pacific Missile Range Facility teamed up with 16 students and faculty from Ke Kula Niihau O Kekaha School, and were reminded that the ocean connects us all. A bottle containing a note from young Saki Arikawa of Kagoshima, Japan, origami flowers and a photo of her sixth-grade class had traveled more than 4,000 miles and five years before coming to light at the Cleanup on the west side of Kauai.

LAUNCH OF NEW TRASH FREE SEAS ALLIANCE

In September, Ocean Conservancy announced the creation of a Trash Free Seas Alliance as our 2011 Commitment to Action at the Annual Meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative in New York City. The Alliance will unite industry, science and conservation leaders who share a common goal for a healthy ocean free of trash.

“Members of the Trash Free Seas Alliance will first and foremost have a safe place for dialogue and a safe place to imagine solutions with others who are equally committed on this issue,” said Vikki Spruill, president and CEO of Ocean Conservancy, during a panel at the Clinton Global Initiative called “Waste to Wealth.” “By bringing influence, brilliance and passion together in one room, we can truly create cutting-edge solutions that make trash too valuable to toss.”

Alliance members will pledge individual responsibility to take internal steps as well as advance long-term solutions to trash free seas. They will also endeavor to reduce and, where possible, reinvent products and services that damage ocean wildlife or ecosystems. Founding members of the Trash Free Seas Alliance recognized at the Clinton Global Initiative include the Coca-Cola Company, Surfrider Foundation, ITW, the Marine Mammal Center, the Ocean Recovery Alliance and Covanta Energy.



Vikki Spruill shares insights alongside global corporate leaders during Clinton Global Initiative panel.

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