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## S'pore coastline getting dirtier

More than 9,750kg of trash cleared during cleanup in September

By **Shobana Kesava**

DESPITE public anti-littering campaigns and annual cleanups involving thousands of people, Singapore's coasts are dirtier than they were five years ago, according to new data.

Over 9,755kg of waste, from plastic bags to refrigerators, was fished off beaches and mangroves during a mammoth cleanup in September, almost 400kg more than in 2007.

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The cleanup was organised by International Coastal Cleanup Singapore (ICCS) and was part of a worldwide drive.

Locally, over 2,500 people - from schoolchildren to business executives and civil servants - took part in the event, fanning out to coastal areas from Changi to Jurong.

The results of the cleanup were recently computed by the entirely volunteer-run ICCS.

Lead coordinator N. Sivasothi said he was not surprised by the volume of trash collected.

He described the cleanup as a stopgap measure, saying the only way to cut down on beach-front trash is to encourage conservation.

'If we use less, that will mean fewer things we need to dispose of. Proper disposal is important so that trash doesn't end up in drains which wash into the sea,' he said.

This year, about 2,530 volunteers participated in the Sept 20 cleanup, down from 2,860 last year. Organisers said the numbers were higher when volunteers who worked on other days of the year were included.

The results of the cleanup show trash trends have varied little over the few years, said Mr Sivasothi.

'It would take an enormous shift in behaviour to change the kind of rubbish we find. I'd be surprised if there was a significant change,' he said.

Plastic bags, straws and styrofoam have been a constant on shorelines here and abroad for years. Larger items, such as refrigerators and tyres, have also been found, according to organisers.

While the September cleanup shows littering habits remain a problem, volunteers are undeterred.

Kranji Mangrove volunteer Cheong Wei Siong, 20, said he has seen the shoreline become progressively cleaner over the years.

'I always feel good visiting the mangroves because they are much cleaner, and I played an important role in it,' he said.

Mr Yasim Abidin, a volunteer who has cleaned the shores for 10 years, said he is not discouraged by the consistently high garbage load.

Every year, the 29-year-old gets 80 children to pair up with Nanyang Polytechnic students to help clean the shoreline. 'It's our small contribution to Singapore and hopefully the children will take the message home and into their future,' he said.

Registration for next year's International Coastal Cleanup will open in March at the website <http://coastalcleanup.nus.edu.sg>

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