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Rising tide of litter on S'pore's shorelines

Feng Zengkun | [The Straits Times](#) (</source/straits-times>) | Saturday, Oct 25, 2014



Photo: ST
Some volunteers doing their bit during a coastal clean-up.

A single environmental programme's volunteers have picked up 14,440kg of rubbish from the shores of Singapore and Pulau Ubin since the start of the year. The haul by volunteers of the International Coastal Cleanup Singapore (ICCS) is just 8kg of the rubbish they cleaned up from the coasts for the whole of last year.

This is despite fewer volunteers and shorter distances canvassed so far this year, going by ICCS statistics. The figures also seem to show that the littering has become worse over the past decade, with the average weight of rubbish collected per volunteer rising from 3.1kg in 2002 to 4.2kg last year.

The average weight of trash picked up per metre of coastline is even more stark, tripling from 0.25kg to 0.74kg in the same period. Environmentalists said the efforts of groups such as the ICCS and Nature Society have pushed back the tides of rubbish, but more can be done.

Mr Eugene Tay, who recently won the National Environment Agency's (NEA) Eco-Friend award, said the waste's sources are still unclear. "I think the NEA should study the sources, such as whether fish farms are dumping the rubbish, and how much of it comes from beachgoers and Singaporeans littering into drains and canals going into the sea," said the founder and director of Green Future Solutions consultancy firm.

Temporary booms placed in some of the island's waterways to intercept floating waste going out to sea could indicate how much of the unsightly coastal trash is coming from inland, he suggested.

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Mr Tay said the NEA could also collect data from the clean-up work of government agencies and green groups here.

Ms Ria Tan, who runs the WildSingapore website, said she has seen fish meal bags, tarpaulins, netting and blue drums like those used on farms here. "Some may claim that the trash could have come from Malaysia, but the Singapore farms far outnumber nearby Malaysian farms and are closer to where the trash has washed up," she said.

Large bulky items such as coffee tables, televisions, refrigerators and even sofas dumped on Pulau Ubin shores not accessible from inland may also be the work of errant local farmers, she said.

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) has said that it has told fish farmers loose items and structures on their farms that could fall into the sea would be marked for traceability.

While there are centralised trash collection points for coastal farmers here, Ms Tan said the authorities should provide daily door-to-door waste collection for them.

AVA found in October last year, when there were 60 licensed fish farms in the east, that each farmer would have to pay \$160 per month for weekly door-to-door collection. The Government said at the time the cost was too high for the farms.

AVA carries out quarterly checks to see if farms dispose of waste properly, and ad-hoc night raids to deter them from towing trash to shore illegally.

Mr Philip Lim, chairman of Singapore Marine Aquaculture Cooperative, said fish farmers here would not pollute the waters that provide their livelihoods.

But he added that very strong monsoon winds, waves generated by passing vessels and irresponsible employees left to man the farms alone could have resulted in some trash tumbling into the sea.

Green Future Solutions' Mr Tay said cleaners' work at the beaches means people often do not see the problem.

But as WildSingapore's Ms Tan added: "The trash hurts the environment, marine life and even Singaporean taxpayers whose money has to go towards cleaning up the mess."

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