

# Coming clean

Whilst we go about our daily lives in this increasingly hectic city, we need to pause and consider the impact we are having on our environment, writes *Gillian Johnston*.

**D**o we really see the trash and debris lying around our city and our shores, and do we add to it ourselves? Sometimes it takes a charity to make us think about coming clean. The much-loved Hong Kong Cleanup, now in its fifteenth year, is nearly a household name these days, having grown steadily year-on-year from just 40 stalwart volunteers in 2000 to over 75,000 participants across the region in 2015.

Originally founded by Canadian and long-term Hong Kong resident Lisa Christensen, the aim of the annual Cleanup is to “empower Hong Kong’s population in actively reducing the amount of trash we generate and taking a role in cleaning up the city, in order to create a paradigm shift and form a social movement with long-lasting behavioural change, getting us closer to a cleaner, greener city.”

To help achieve this, for their fifteenth anniversary, the Hong Kong Cleanup aims to engage five per cent of the population over one year, through not only Cleanups and events, but also active campaigns and social media.

## Small beginnings

From the handful of friends who gathered for the first, single-day Cleanup, the event has expanded to a six-week challenge covering not just Hong Kong’s extensive coastline but also our country parks and even urban areas. This expansion makes it easy for anyone to participate – there’s really no excuse! It also highlights that ocean trash almost always originates on land.

And it’s been a success so far: in 2015 the Hong Kong Cleanup Challenge



broke its own records yet again, engaging 75,623 people in collecting an estimated 4,616,067 kg (or 5,683,891 pieces) of rubbish, mostly from Hong Kong’s valuable natural areas.

“The cleanup is only the beginning,” highlights co-founder and event director Nissa Marion. “Our ultimate end goal is to put ourselves out of a job! We want to eliminate the problem of trash that plagues our ecosystems, and we believe this is possible within our lifetime, through citizen behaviour change supported by zero waste goals, extended producer responsibility and government policy.”

## Global impact

Organised by Ecozine and The Nature Conservancy, the Cleanup initiative is the work of a small (yet passionate) team. It’s made possible through sponsorship and support from companies, schools, media outlets, chambers of commerce, and NGOs. The Hong Kong Cleanup is also an integral part of Ocean Conservancy’s International Coastal Cleanup, linking

local activities to a much larger global movement, whilst sharing data and learnings with organisations around the world.

To boost its presence, the Hong Kong Cleanup has had the support of numerous celebrity ambassadors including power couple Daniel and Lisa Wu. “The Hong Kong Cleanup is a great showcase of Hong Kong’s strong spirit of community and collaboration, and what a positive effect it has on the environment when we all work together,” says Daniel. To which Lisa adds, “With over 75,000 people taking an active role in cleaning up Hong Kong this year, I am confident that awareness about the importance of waste reduction will continue to spread.” 

So let’s all come clean and keep our environment – both urban and rural – litter free. To find out more, register a Cleanup team or get involved, visit the Hong Kong Cleanup Facebook page or email [info@hkcleanup.org](mailto:info@hkcleanup.org).