

JOURNEY TO THE PLASTIC OCEAN

Tracey Read recently returned from the Algalita/5 Gyres Tsunami Debris Expedition where she sailed from Japan to Hawaii over 28 days.

The first week on board was rough, sailing through 6m high seas with 40 knot gale force winds. Once the seas calmed down enough to commence surface trawls the truth was obvious. The sample contained significant amounts of plastic fragments, as did every single one of the 29 trawls.

The crew documented every bit of plastic that was seen from the boat and the data revealed plastic floated by every 3.6 minutes. "Seeing a toothbrush, a plastic water bottle and a cigarette lighter in the middle of the Pacific Ocean is a really tragic sight, it is a terrible legacy to leave". The plastic stretched the whole 3800 miles from Tokyo to Hawaii.

The crew also found debris that had most likely come from the Japanese tsunami as well. This included the hull of a Japanese fishing skiff with its identifying marks still visible, some tatami matting and an unused car tyre.

Tracey said "It was an incredible voyage with the power and beauty of nature contrasting sharply with evidence of our careless and wasteful behaviours". She has plans to continue working with community, schools and government to reduce Hong Kong's impact on the oceans. Tracey will be talking about the expedition in September. More details will be available at www.journeytotheplasticocean.wordpress.com



PHOTOGRAPHY TRACEY READ

ECOLOGICAL DISASTER HITS DB'S BEACHES

Following Typhoon Vicente, the tropical storm that battered our shores on July 23rd, a major ecological disaster hit our beaches. The worst typhoon to affect us in 13 years uprooted trees and caused extensive damage to property. However, that was not all. Six shipping containers of preproduction plastic pellets, or nurdles, were lost at sea during the typhoon spilling millions of beadlike plastic pieces onto Hong Kong's south facing beaches. One of the worst hit areas was Sam Pak Wan beach in the North Plaza.

According to DB Green, once in the waterways these plastic pieces are impossible to remove and act as a sponge to soak up Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) which are industrial chemicals or pesticides. These highly toxic chemicals can cause adverse effects in humans such as cancer, reproductive disorders and disruption to the immune and endocrine systems. The easiest and most common way for these nurdles (and therefore POPs) to get into the food chain is to be mistaken as fish eggs and eaten by marine life.

Tracey Read of DB Green, and local environmental campaigner for Sea Shepherd, Gary Stokes, have been in contact with the necessary government departments, DB management, and the manufacturing company SINOPEC. Tracey told us "The speed of response and manpower that has been offered for this massive pellet spill has been surprising and very much appreciated. All the government departments that we asked for help have assisted and our local management was great in providing an immediate response. We had the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), the Food, Environment & Hygiene Department (FEHD), Marine Department and local management cleaning

the beach with a few of us volunteers the day after discovery."

They initially removed about 5000kg of pellets from Sam Pak Wan which included around 200 full Sinopec branded bags. Tracey said "The whole beach was covered in typhoon debris and what looked like snow. In some places it was knee deep".

This disaster is not unique to DB, the nurdles are prolific on many local beaches. For the last 2 weeks thousands of volunteers from all over Hong Kong have been removing nurdles with sieves, brooms, buckets and shovels. On August 5th and 6th around 600 volunteers came to DB to help with some from as far away as Fanling and for most it was their first time here and their first time participating in a beach cleanup.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

At the time of going to press, more volunteers were still required to sweep the plastic pellets off the tide lines on beaches before they get back into the water. Please take 30 minutes to get down to the beach and help. The plastic isn't harmful whilst it is on the sand and garbage bags can be put in the normal rubbish bin.

Need more info?

www.dbgreen.org

www.journeytotheplasticocean.wordpress.com

<http://www.facebook.com/PlasticDisasterHongKong>

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