



City

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Cool kids. Two youngsters chill out on the beach at Repulse Bay yesterday on another sweltering day. On Saturday it was 32.9 degrees Celsius in Tsim Sha

Tsui, the hottest day of the year, and it was 32.8 degrees in Sheung Shui yesterday. But showers are forecast for this week. Photo: Sam Tsang

Amount of waste collected doubles in decade, says Marine Department

Rising tide of trash found in HK waters

Cheung Chi-fai

Hong Kong has failed to halt the rising tide of trash dumped into the sea, with the amount collected nearly doubling in a decade, the Marine Department says.

More than 12,900 tonnes of trash was cleared from waters around the city last year, a 5 per cent increase over 2007. This compares with 6,750 tonnes in 1998. Yet the latest figure does not include the 15,500 tonnes collected at beaches by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD).

Lisa Christensen, director of Coastal Cleanup Challenge, an international event to promote ocean protection, said statistics from cleanup events showed that at least three-quarters of the floating trash was produced locally.

"The extensive data we collected over the years indicates Hong Kong, as a society, suffers from a 'pick up after me' syndrome," she said.

"There is a lack of awareness and responsibility for the masses of waste we generate.

"There is also insufficient government support to the recycling industries, and subsequently we are finding enormous amounts of recyclable waste, especially plastics, along Hong Kong's beaches and in the water."

About a quarter of the trash collected last year, nearly 3,000 tonnes, was from Aberdeen and Tin Wan, where fishing vessels unload their catch on to a wholesale market.

Off Central, where a major reclamation project is under way, the volume of trash removed topped 600 tonnes – a rise of 23 per cent over 2006. The fastest-growing areas for dumping trash are Chek Lap Kok, the airport island, and the Rambler Channel, near the Kwai Chung container port – with 26.4 and 65.5 tonnes last year, an increase of 7.6 and 2.3 times respectively over 2006.

Clarus Chu Ping-shing, a senior marine conservation officer at WWF Hong Kong, said some trash might have been swept in across the border in bad weather.

"Whenever there are heavy downpours and the water current is right, [a massive amount of] rubbish will drift into the city. Much of it is foam, broken furniture, plastic bags and bottles with labels written in simplified Chinese characters," he said.

Mr Chu blamed the poor system of collecting trash on the mainland but said local fishermen and holiday-makers should be responsible for their waste and not throw things into the sea.

He also pointed the finger at the Hong Kong government for adopting a fragmented approach to the prob-

Talking trash

The amount of rubbish collected by various government departments at beaches, marine parks and reserves (in tonnes)

	FEHD	LCSO	AFCO	Marine Department
04	5,800	4,700	446	10,790
05	6,700	4,900	440	11,727
06	8,900	3,700	393	12,167
07	7,100	2,990	319	12,209
08	10,000	5,200	296	12,913

Increases in marine rubbish collected annually between 2006-08 (tonnes)

Central	489-601	▲23%	Stanley	145-183	▲26%
Sham Shui Po	930-1163	▲25%	Rambler Channel	19.8-65.5	▲230%
Junk Bay	17-23	▲35%	Chek Lap Kok	2.7-26.4	▲760%
Tin Wan	924-1,407	▲52%			

SOURCES: MARINE DEPARTMENT, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE DEPARTMENT, LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT, AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT



SCMP GRAPHIC

lem, with responsibilities for gazetted beaches, non-gazetted beaches, harbour areas, ecologically sensitive areas and overseas assigned to different departments.

The Marine Department is responsible for trash floating outside beaches, and relies on a contractor operating 70 vessels to collect and transport it. The department said it had implemented a series of measures, including publicity and education, to counter the problem.

It is also offering free trash-collection services to vessels and harbour

patrols to enforce the littering law. A spokesman said: "The department will flexibly deploy resources to cope with expected and observed situations having regard to the prevailing weather conditions."

A spokesman for the FEHD said it regularly cleaned up beaches.

"The number of workers and the cleansing frequency vary, depending on the actual situation of the individual ungazetted beach and the amount of waste to be cleared. It could be as many as 40 workers and as frequently as twice a week."

Bureau to advise schools on drugs

Agnes Lam

The Education Bureau is preparing guidelines on how schools should handle pupils with drug problems.

On Saturday the lawmaker for the education sector, Cheung Man-kwong, voiced shock at the failure of police to act in a case of drug abuse at Rosaryhill School in Stubbs Road.

The commissioner for narcotics, Sally Wong Pik-ye, said yesterday: "The Education Bureau will issue a more detailed guideline to schools about how to handle students with drug-abuse problems. At present, school management should inform the bureau, police school-liaison officers, social workers stationed at schools, and teachers after spotting students with drug problems."

"Schools can also inform the counselling centre for psychotropic-substance abusers if more help is needed. Also, schools should inform

parents and students." As to whether schools should call in police for drug incidents and the pupils involved be prosecuted, she said: "They should be handled case by case depending on the nature of each incident."

Rosaryhill School said four girls were found to be high on ketamine last Tuesday. It was reported to police but no action was taken.

Responding to a number of recent drug cases involving students, Ms

Trust between students, teachers and social workers might be affected by drug tests

Sally Wong Pik-ye, commissioner for narcotics

Wong said the government had always been concerned and was studying plans to introduce voluntary drug testing at schools.

"But we should not rush to introduce the scheme at schools. We must first clarify some issues such as human rights and privacy," Ms Wong said. "Trust between students, teachers and social workers might be affected by drug tests."

She said the government was aware there was an increasing trend of teenage drug abuse.

Daniel Shek Tan-lei, chairman of the Action Committee Against Narcotics, said more studies should be carried out before voluntary drug testing was introduced at schools.

"Time is needed to tackle some legal and technical issues. Also, we have to think how to help students with drug problems after they are spotted," he said.

Professor Shek said consultant



Talkback Should schools test pupils for drugs? Send your comments to talkback@scmp.com

companies would be invited this month to bid for a research project to study the introduction of voluntary drug tests at schools. The research was expected to be finished in 2011. "A public consultation on compulsory drug testing by law-enforcement officers in the city will be held in the fourth quarter of this year."

Meanwhile, Mui Wo residents yesterday used a forum to voice their objections to an application by Christian Zheng Sheng College to use the vacant New Territories Heung Yee Kuk Southern District Secondary School.

The college, the city's only private school for young drug abusers, applied to the Education Bureau in December 2006.

Rail staff want union for casuals after theft

Anita Lam

MTR Corporation staff plan to set up a union to monitor the work of contract workers, following the loss of 33 metres of power cables from the track at Tsing Yi station last week.

Police are investigating the theft and no arrest has been made. A police source and a veteran repairs and maintenance staff member both said the thief was likely to be someone familiar with rail operations.

The Hon-bun of the Hong Kong Railway General Union said it would seek approval from the MTR Corp to form a union for contract and casual workers. Many contract workers worked on the railway tracks at night, he said, but not all of them were required to register. "Sometimes only their supervisor is required to do so."

Currently, only management-level staff members are responsible for monitoring such workers, but Mr Tse said frontline staff should also be allowed to assist. The MTR Corp should also step up its nighttime security measures, he said.

Last Tuesday before operations began, MTR Corp staff discovered that 15 metres of power cabling worth about HK\$21,000 had gone missing from a tunnel near Tsing Yi station on the Airport Express line. The problem was promptly fixed and service was not interrupted.

The company reported the theft to police on Wednesday, but another 18 metres of cabling was found to be missing on Thursday.

Mr Tse said: "This time the damage did not affect our operations, but if it was the signalling system that the thief fiddled with, there could be more serious consequences."

Last week's incidents were the latest in a series of such thefts – others being at various construction sites. The copper inside the power cables can be recycled.

Mr Tse said the cables stolen last week were not used for the main power supply and a backup system was available. The more important cables were usually covered so it would be more difficult for outsiders to gain access to them.

Octopus use in cabs urged to end holdups

Agnes Lam

A taxi drivers' group has called for the use of Octopus cards to settle fares after two cabbies were robbed by teenagers in the space of a week.

This would relieve drivers of the need to carry too much cash, said Lai Ming-hung, chairman of the Taxi and Public Light Bus Concern Group.

"Potential robbers will find it less tempting to target taxi drivers if drivers don't have much cash with them. Even when taxi drivers are robbed, the loss can be minimised with the use of Octopus cards."

Mr Lai also appealed to taxi drivers to install radio equipment so that they could communicate with the call centre.

"Drivers only have to press a button to talk to staff on duty at the call centre or so that staff at the call centre can hear a conversation inside a taxi. That will scare off some potential robbers," Mr Lai said.

"Many drivers don't use the radio service anymore as they find it cheaper to use mobile phones."

On Saturday, police arrested four boys who attempted to rob a taxi driver in Tuen Mun. They caught the cab in Tai Ho Road, Tsuen Wan, and asked to be taken to Butterfly Bay in Tuen Mun.

On arrival at about 6.30pm, one of the youths attacked the 53-year-old driver and another tried to grab his cash box. They fled empty-handed. Police later arrested the four youngsters in Castle Peak.

Last Monday, two girls aged 13 and 15 were arrested for mugging a taxi driver at knife-point, robbing him of HK\$660 and a mobile phone.

A third girl, 13, wanted in connection with the case surrendered to police the next day. The trio allegedly flagged down the taxi in Chai Wan shortly after midnight and told Lai Shu-keung, 50, to take them to Kwai Chung.

One of them sat next to the driver while the other two sat in the back. When the cab reached Hibiscus Park in Hing Shing Road, each of the girls took out a knife or cutter and threatened him.

City Digest

Safety

Boy injured as shopping centre door breaks

A four-year-old boy injured his arms and legs after a glass door broke at the Yat Tung shopping centre in Tung Chung yesterday. Police said they would see if the boy had used excess force to open the door, while his mother vowed legal action. A centre spokesman said the panels were thoroughly inspected in April and again two weeks ago, and no faults were found. Anita Lam

Education

School supervisor faces budget questions

The Education Bureau will continue discussions today with the management of Pegasus Philip Wong Kin Hang Christian Primary School cum Junior Secondary School over the change of its sponsoring body. The school's directors will also fix a date with school supervisor Carman Leung to hold a meeting to discuss budget reports from the past two years. Agnes Lam

Immigration

Suspected IIs arrested in Sai Kung

Sixteen suspected illegal immigrants from South Asia have been arrested in the Sai Kung area, police say. Police, including marine officers, stopped the men, aged 18 to 40, in and around Luk Wu at about 11am yesterday, shortly after they landed. They were handed over to the Immigration Department. One man was taken to hospital last night with minor injuries. Danny Mok

Cheung Chi-fai

Volunteers are rolling up their sleeves to help clean coastal pollution black spots in a series of campaigns over the coming months that they hope will raise awareness of the need to protect the shoreline.

About 30 to 50 volunteers, mostly Lantau residents, made a start yesterday by removing rubbish from a mudflat in Shui Hau, near Tong Fuk.

The mudflat is known as a habitat for the endangered horseshoe crab – whose numbers are reportedly declining due to pollution and excessive harvesting.

Ian Brady, a general manager at a restaurant near the beach, said: "The beach is bad enough. It is not nice at all and quite dirty, with no one cleaning it up on a regular basis."

Volunteers pitch in to remove piles of litter from HK beaches

He believed that some of the rubbish piled up on the beach had been washed up by large waves and it sat in the rocks without people noticing.

To promote marine conservation, the Hong Kong International Coastal Cleanup Challenge will be officially launched today on World Ocean Day, which is designated by the United Nations.

The campaign, initiated by the US-based group Ocean Conservancy, has a history of 23 years.

This will be the ninth year that Hong Kong has played a part in the campaign, with the number of participants increasing each year.

Last year, the coastal cleanup event attracted about 5,000 volunteers from schools, corporations and individuals.

They collected more than 25

tonnes of trash, much of it broken glass, plastic bottles and bags. Ecovision, a Hong Kong-based environmental-action body, is the event's host appointed by Ocean Conservancy.

A global cleanup campaign will kick off on September 19 and companies are invited to form teams to join the challenge.

Lisa Christensen, director of the event, said the primary goal was to change people's attitudes through education and drive home the importance of taking the "four Rs" – rethink, reduce, reuse and recycle – seriously.

"The coastal cleanup challenge is growing each year and is now the largest volunteer event in the world, but sadly much more participation is necessary. Our ultimate goal is to be able to cancel this event," she said.