

CLEANING UP THE PLANET

China joins global effort by mobilizing more than 1 million people to take part in the campaign

BELJING — More than 100,000 volunteers in 132 cities spent a weekend picking up plastic and other waste across the country, in a joint worldwide effort to clean up the planet.

To celebrate the 10th World Cleanup Day on Sept 15, some 700 non-profit NGOs and social groups held activities aimed at cleaning up the environment and tackling the waste crisis throughout China, mobilizing an estimated 1 million-plus people.

It is the first time that China has participated in the event, which was launched in Estonia in 2008.

On Sept 15, an international civic action kicked off in the Pacific islands of Fiji and Vanuatu, and continued around the globe in a 24-hour marathon that ended in American Samoa.

More than 13 million people from 155 countries and regions joined forces to collect man-made non-degradable trash, according to World Cleanup Day headquarters, which called the event "the largest peacetime civic action in human history".

From snowcapped mountains to vast oceans, people united in taking action to

“Where there is a will, every day can be and should be ‘Cleanup Day.’”

Ma Yongjian, a volunteer from Beijing who recently did "plogging" — jogging while picking up trash in a local park

remove waste from the environment to raise awareness of the severity of the crisis.

The Asian countries of Indonesia and Pakistan topped the volunteer chart with 3.3 and 3 million participants, respectively, while in Kyrgyzstan, volunteers accounted for 7 percent of the population.

"Today, I truly believe that, as humans, we do have more hope!" says Eva Truueverk, head of the managing board of the Let's Do It foundation, promoter of World Cleanup Day.

The nation in action
On the Qinghai-Tibet Pla-

teau, Tsering Chozom and her squad of volunteers swept vast amounts of waste off major highways that bring millions of tourists to the region every year.

Since 2015, more than 200,000 travelers have taken part in the cause by helping local volunteers pick up trash along the "high roads to heaven".

On a national scale, another million people have signed up for the Beautiful Travel program that calls for civility and eco-conscious behavior as tourists.

Lin Peng, a young cyclist and travel aficionado, was alarmed at the damage that discarded waste caused in the sacred highlands when he rode his tricycle along the National Highway 318 from the southwestern province of Sichuan to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet autonomous region.

It took him 92 days to collect non-degradable trash, fill woven bags and hitchhike to the nearest disposal facility.

"I collected more than 500 bags of trash, and that didn't even make 1 percent of the waste I saw along the way," he said in an interview with Xinhua after coordinating a World Cleanup Day activity in



A group of young people take part in a "plogging" event this June in Cologne, Germany. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Students from a primary school in Xiangyang, Hubei, pick up litter beside a river at a cleaning event. YANG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

his native Jiangxi province.

Lin soon plans to embark on another project to clean up the surrounding areas of Poyang Lake, the largest freshwater lake in China, in a 500-kilometer-long journey that will take several months.

"My goal is to pick up all the trash scattered across the

country, and with my own actions influence more travelers and ultimately society," he said.

"Where there is a will, every day can be and should be 'Cleanup Day,'" says Ma Yongjian, a volunteer from Beijing who recently did "plogging" — jogging while picking up trash

— with his friends in Yudong Park in the northwest of the city.

Work from the source

Red Bull cans, Nongfu Spring plastic bottles, cigarette packets and Hi-Tiger bottles were the top four waste products in Lin Peng's collection along the Sichuan-Tibet highway.

In Yudong Park, Ma Yongjian and his friends estimated that around 80 percent of the trash was cigarette butts, which, according to a recent study, are one of the most harmful and biggest man-made contaminants in our oceans.

In the meantime, thousands of single-use paper cups discarded along the Beijing International Marathon route drew criticism from the public for being "a competition for throwing away trash".

"We must change the way of living we are used to, to reduce waste from its source," says Joe

Harvey, a British national and promoter of "zero waste" lifestyles in China.

He and his girlfriend Carrie Yu created The Bulk House, a brand that provides zero-waste solutions for daily living. In their store located in downtown Beijing, customers can find long-lasting stainless steel straws to replace plastic ones, or bio-detergents that leave no impact on the environment.

They are urging people to reduce or eliminate the use of plastic and single-use disposables, such as plastic utensils, bags and beverage bottles.

Sounding a note of caution, Mao Da, a specialist in environmental history at Beijing Normal University, says: "In recent years, the massive consumption and materialistic frenzy have worsened the waste situation as trash has been produced at a faster pace and in greater quantities."

XINHUA

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