

'I hope people realise that every little action makes a difference'

Cheong Wei Siong, 21, student and environmental volunteer

It's easy for him to hit Control-C and Control-V whenever he comes across a website talking about the ailing environment.

But for Cheong Wei Siong, forwarding emails to his friends and leaving website links on their chat windows is never quite as fulfilling as his work with International Coastal Cleanup Singapore (ICCS).

There, he is able to reach up to 1,500 Singaporeans a year. And it is his hope that more people would have their eyes opened to the impact of their everyday actions on the environment.

It takes more than just getting the participants of ICCS' programmes to pick up the bottle caps, toothbrushes, plastic cups and other litter that pollutes the shores. Mr Cheong tells them stories of how birds, turtles and fishes are harmed after swallowing such items.

And when participants, who are usually sent by schools and companies, witness this first hand, they can see that "marine debris doesn't fall from the sky but from human hands".

Before each cleanup, participants attend workshops where they learn how the

collected trash contributes to data used in tackling marine pollution.

It was his experience in just such a programme with his secondary school eight years ago that led Mr Cheong to contribute to the ICCS' cause. He came across a few horseshoe crabs entangled in discarded nets.

"It was a disheartening sight," he said. "This very first cleanup made me realise that we have a personal responsibility for the health of the ocean."

He remained active throughout his JC and army days, serving as a mangrove site coordinator for three years.

Now, he oversees the cleanup operation on beaches along the country's north-eastern shore.

But the nature lover, who is now pursuing business administration at the Nanyang Technological University, still believes it is the little actions that go a long way. At home, he switches off the lights when not in use and keeps his air conditioner at 25°C.

"As long as people do the minimum, that's actually really good already," he said.

NG HUIWEN



Wei Siong supervises and encourages participants during cleanups at ICCS' north-east zone beach site, which includes Punggol beach and Pasir Ris beach. SIM YI JIN



'I wish we all recycled'

Raina Ow, 51, self-employed

Several times a week, she gets on her slightly rusty, blue bicycle and puts on her pink floral-print hat and sunglasses. As she cycles by – sometimes wearing make-up and heels – curious heads turn to stare at the two baskets in the front and back of her bike, which are filled to the brim with recyclables.

Meet Raina Ow, the 51-year-old who cannot wait. To recycle, that is.

Not content with having her recyclables collected fortnightly, Ms Ow began depositing them at recycling bins in her estate two years ago.

It is a simple routine for her, but she understands that not many people have the time for

this. And so, her dream is that the central refuse chute in HDB blocks can be turned into a convenient recycling bin for all residents.

Ideally, she hopes the chutes will have separate slots for plastic, paper, tin and waste food.

Her dream is not that out of place: Since 2006, some residents in Choa Chu Kang have been benefitting from an initiative where their refuse chutes have two compartments, for recyclables and trash.

Not knowing if such a project will come to her estate, Ms Ow has already influenced others to "go green".

One neighbour, for instance, noticed her packing her recyclables.

"Now, I see her recycling too," she said.

Her sons, too, have caught the bug: They pass her their empty drink cans and old study notes to her for recycling, while old toys, uniforms and textbooks are given away or exchanged.

Ms Ow's enthusiasm makes it hard to believe she was once part of the "buy and throw" culture. She used to replace her old furniture without hesitation; now she realises how wasteful that is.

It takes just three minutes each time for Ms Ow to cycle to the recycling bin, but with every trip she makes, she buys even more time for future generations on this Earth. NG HUIWEN

It was a disheartening sight ... This very first cleanup made me realise that we have a personal responsibility for the health of the ocean.

Environmental volunteer Cheong Wei Siong on witnessing horseshoe crabs entangled in discarded nets eight years ago

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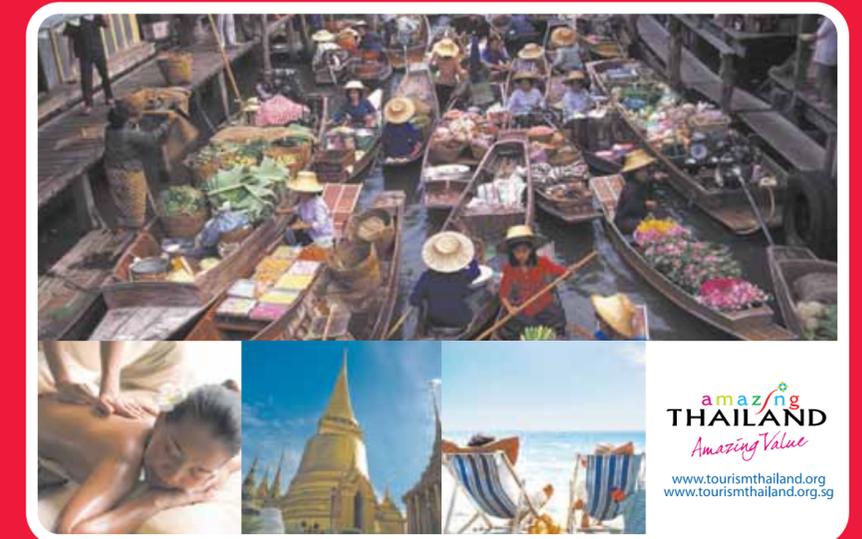
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