

Severe Typhoon Vicente hit Hong Kong on 23 July 2012, causing six containers loaded with 150 tonnes of polypropylene pellets which are raw materials of various plastic products, to be lost off a ship. Then, the containers smashed onto islands and ripped open, sacks filled with the polypropylene floated free and burst, releasing billions of pellets less than one centimetre in size. They washed up onto Hong Kong's beaches and threatening our marine life. Afterwards, plastic "snow" was reported by volunteers from DB Green and Sea Shepherd on Discovery Bay's North Beach. In addition, full bags of pellets washed up on Shek O beach, some 30 kilometres to the southeast. Later, pellets and bags were seen on dozens of other beaches on the islands of Lamma, Peng Chau, Cheung Chau and Lantau.

A staff of WWF visited Tung O Wan on Lamma Island on 5 August to assess the extent of the spill there. Since there was a strong early response from green groups and volunteers across Hong Kong, WWF concentrated resources on more remote parts of Hong Kong waters. Samantha Lee, WWF-Hong Kong's Senior Conservation Officer, says, "When it became obvious that this was not an isolated spill and that these pellets were everywhere in southern waters, we had to take action."

On 6 and 7 August, the volunteers and the WWF team went to clean up harder-to-reach areas with high ecological value, such as the Soko Islands where a habitat for both the Chinese white dolphin and Finless porpoise. In the Soko Islands, a large amount of debris was found on the beach: plastic pellets and a vast tide of other garbage, such as used polystyrene boxes. Furthermore, the boxes were piled metres high in one sea cave.

Next, WWF's team focused on southeast Hong Kong, especially Waglan Island, Beaufort Island and the Po Toi Islands. Beaufort Island was at the centre of our efforts since a container smashed open there, releasing millions of pellets into a small cove. On 6, 7 and 10 August, our team concentrated on the Po Toi group of islands to assess the latest extent of the pellet spillage and to tackle the worst areas because the rugged Po Toi Island Group is ecologically important and it is a known habitat for the Finless porpoise, high diversity for reef fishes, and supports a number of hard and soft coral species. Then, our team went to Beaufort Island and found a large number of pellets washed up on the coastline and dispersed throughout the area, including a sizeable number washed onto rock faces by wave action. Plastic pellets had accumulated to a depth of more than one foot on parts of the island's shoreline, and thousands of pellets were found trapped between rocks and in the plants on the island's coastline. Therefore, our team and volunteers focused on clean-up missions

at Beaufort islands.

In Plastic Pellet Cleanup Action, it was a great success due to the enormous efforts of the WWF team and our magnificent volunteers. We collected more than 80 bags of plastic pellets, a lot of other marine trash and many Styrofoam boxes, and two large pieces of the wrecked container. During recruitment of volunteers, the volunteer response to the spill was enthusiastic and unprecedented. They came from disparate age groups and occupations donated thousands of hours of time. This has proved that the Hong Kong people are aware of the importance of a healthy marine environment. Evolved from the wake of the disaster, WWF had partnership with local community organizations and the government to launch the “Adopt A Beach” programme (currently named as Coastal Watch). This programme intends to keep Hong Kong’s beaches and coastlines in a beautiful state. It also aims to further raise the awareness of the public regarding the extent of the rubbish and pollution problems.

For more, please visit our website

[http://www.wwf.org.hk/en/reslib/publications/aboutlife\\_2012autumn/](http://www.wwf.org.hk/en/reslib/publications/aboutlife_2012autumn/)

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