

Coastal Cleanup by People Embracing the Sea

Located beside the Sea of Japan, Fukui Prefecture is known for its crystal-clear ocean water. However, large volumes of ocean debris are washing up along this beautiful coastline. In response, local citizens are making admirable efforts to protect the ocean.

In a small coastal town on the Sea of Japan, a group of people is working diligently to keep the beaches clean. Because Mikuni Sunset Beach, a popular summertime ocean bathing spot, faces west, debris carried by currents in the Sea of Japan often washes ashore. We asked a female surfer, who leads the beach cleanup efforts, about what kinds of things turn up.

She explained that trash typically consists of things like fishing gear, plastic bottles, and polyethylene tanks. And sometimes they find medical waste such as syringes. Much of the debris has Korean writing on it. What is more surprising is that sometimes several items of the same

thing wash ashore—leading one to suspect that they were disposed of systematically and intentionally. She also said that medical waste and polyethylene tanks contain residual hazardous substances, such as caustic soda, and are extremely dangerous; because of this, special care needs to be taken to keep children away during the cleanup activities.

“In the past, coastal debris was entirely comprised of organic materials such as grass and wood, which would eventually decompose

and return to nature. These days, there is an increasing amount of plastic materials in ocean trash that just floats along with the currents and never breaks down. I think that people’s way of thinking has not kept up with such changes. We want to convey a simple message to Koreans: Don’t dump into the ocean! Don’t pollute the ocean.”

She went on to say, “Some time ago, when I heard that trash from Japan was washed ashore in Hawaii, it made me feel ashamed. If people who throw trash into the sea understand

that such garbage causes problems far away and develop a sense of shame, perhaps things will change.”

The group, which currently comprises around 45 members of the Fukui Branch of the Nippon Surfing Association, conducts cleanup activities once a month. They work with the local government, which supports them by collecting the trash free of charge. Local children are learning about the importance of keeping the environment clean in various ways. Parents pick up trash with their children, especially during school summer holidays and after local events, and cleanup activities are also incorporated as part of surfing classes. The west-facing bay is the final destination for debris that drifts in on the ocean currents, and because the garbage never stops

coming, some members comment that the work is never-ending. Despite this, the group continues to work with the following conviction: “If we keep up these efforts, in the end there will be no more trash.”

In this way, the marine environment is protected by the diligent efforts of people who are embracing the sea. People who throw trash into the sea need to be conscious of what is happening and understand the negative consequences of littering.

Recently, requests have begun to change the name of the “Sea of Japan,”

a name that even South Korea has not objected to in bilateral meetings or international conferences, to the “East Sea,” which is a name that is only used domestically inside South Korea. However, if we truly care about these waters, preserving the marine environment is far more important than trying to change its name. The ocean transcends national borders. Every person who benefits from the ocean’s bounty must think about the ocean as a whole as well as those on the other sides of it and join together to protect our global marine environment. ✱



If beached plastic debris is not immediately collected, it will return to the ocean. Persistent and regular efforts are essential. Once a year, surfers from around Japan converge on Mikuni Sunset Beach to engage in a concerted cleanup.



A considerable amount of trash, such as bottles and drums containing chemicals that are too hazardous to touch, also wash ashore.



Rubbish dumped on the other side of the Sea of Japan is carried to the shoreline of Fukui Prefecture.



TVs and refrigerators with Korean labeling wash up on the beach.

