

## **AECO's Clean Seas Project yielding results and looking ahead**

**As the Arctic cruise season ends, the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) looks back on the results of this summer's efforts to combat marine plastic pollution and looks at the upcoming Antarctic Season.**

All summer, AECO has been working with cruise operators to identify ways to reduce the use of disposable plastic on ships. AECO's UN affiliated Clean Seas Project also focuses on enhancing the involvement of expedition cruise passengers in Arctic beach cleanups.

Ninety percent of AECO members consider single-use plastic reduction a high priority. From phasing out single-use plastic cups to installing water and soap dispensers to reduce the number of plastic containers used on board, AECO members are already taking steps forward. They are also making great contributions on the cleanup side of things.

At least 128 beach cleanups were completed by AECO members' expedition cruise ships this summer, often in remote coastal areas where those make a big difference as fishing nets and other debris can have devastating effects on local wildlife. So far this year, the combined cleanup efforts in Svalbard have collected over 40 tons of marine litter. This impressive number is the result of volunteer actions from AECO members, Svalbard's local sports association, Governor of Svalbard volunteer cruises, the Norwegian Coast Guards and several private initiatives, including one involving the Norwegian Royal Family.

### **Contributing knowledge**

However, cleaning up waste is just one step in a larger effort to understand and address marine litter. AECO members have helped document the distribution and composition of the waste they collected. This information can give researchers valuable insight that ultimately will help us beat plastic pollution.

In September AECO participated in the annual marine litter analysis workshop at Longyearbyen waste management. Thanks to experts, we know that at least 70% of the marine litter in Svalbard waste comes from the fisheries. Understanding why and how the waste enters the environment is key to preventing it from getting there in the first place. For example, buoys have an important economic value and will most likely be lost during operations whereas small pieces of nets cut during repairs on deck are discarded.

### **Looking ahead**

As expedition vessels leave the northern hemisphere and head to Antarctica for the Austral summer, the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) which cooperates with AECO on the Clean Seas campaign ensures continued engagement and outreach from all members.

With guests from around the world traveling with AECO and IAATO members, we have a great opportunity to turn the tide on plastic if all on board follow up at home. We hope our guests check their local retailers for goods with less packaging in order to reduce waste and that their participation in cleanups in remote polar regions motivates them to join a local cleanup or even start their own.

**Images available** on AECO's flickr account. Please credit photos: AECO, photographer, company.  
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