

Press release from AECO - Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (for immediate release):

Arctic cruise operators celebrate World Cleanup Day

As the Arctic cruise season draws to a close, the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) marks World Cleanup Day by looking back on the results of this summer's efforts to combat marine plastic pollution.

All summer, AECO's Environmental Agent Sarah Auffret 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.

Raising awareness

According to Auffret, people are becoming more and more aware of the problem of marine litter.

"The project is about cutting down on single-use plastic and cleaning up litter that has already found its way to the ocean, but it's also about educating people. Photos of polar bears chewing on Styrofoam send a strong message about how important it is that we change our habits. With World Cleanup Day happening this Saturday, there are many events organized around the world. We encourage everyone to join a cleanup and reflect on the choices they make as consumers," says Auffret.

Seeing results

AECO's efforts to change attitudes and address the problem is already yielding results. Auffret says that she is impressed with what has been achieved in a just few, busy months.

"I've visited 21 ships and witnessed the changes they are making, for example by installing water dispenser to get rid of disposable water bottles. We've also seen that our members are making great contributions on the cleanup side of things. We know that at least 127 cleanups were completed by expedition cruise ships this summer, often in remote coastal areas where they can make a big difference. Fishing nets and other debris can have devastating effects on local wildlife and every cleanup counts," says Auffret.

However, cleaning up waste is just one step in a larger effort to understand and address marine litter.

"Our members are helping document the distribution, composition and origin of the waste that they collect. This information can give researchers valuable insight that ultimately will help us beat plastic pollution," says Auffret.

Tons of litter removed

So far this summer, the combined cleanup efforts in Svalbard have collected over 40,000 kg of marine litter. This impressive number is the result of volunteer efforts of AECO members, Svalbard's local sports association, Governor of Svalbard volunteer cruises, the Norwegian Coast Guards and even the Norwegian Royal Family.

“In addition to larger fishing nets and other objects, our members are doing an impressive job of picking up small pieces of plastic that litter the shore of so many beaches. It’s tedious work, but it’s important to remove it before it breaks down to microplastics and enters the food chain”, says Auffret.

Millions of people in 150 countries are expected to take part in World Cleanup Day, which takes place on September 15.

Suggested illustration photos

High resolution illustration images can be downloaded here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ptu81p7ktx5ty4p/AAA3KYtGx4fl2qcyOUXaKLpka?dl=0>



Bear chewing on Styrofoam in Svalbard.
Photo: Jonathan R. Green, G Adventures.



Expedition cruise passenger and staff cleaning litter from beach in Svalbard.
Photo: Chase Teron, Natural World Safaris.



Expedition cruise staff free a seal that was caught in an abandoned fishing net in Svalbard.
Photo: Rolf Stange.



Map showing sites cleaned by AECO members.
Illustration: AECO / esri.com



AECO's environmental agent Sarah Auffret next to the container where AECO members deposit collected marine litter in Longyearbyen.

Photo: Edda Falk, AECO.

AECO - Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators

Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators is an international organization for expedition cruise operators and associates in the Arctic, dedicated to managing environmentally friendly, safe and considerate cruise tourism. With close to 70 international members – including 40 vessel operators, owners and management, and 50 expedition cruise vessels that are organized by the association – AECO represent the great majority of these operations in the Arctic.

Website: www.aeco.no.

The Clean Seas campaign

UN Environment launched #CleanSeas in February 2017, with the aim of engaging governments, the general public, civil society and the private sector in the fight against marine plastic litter. Over the next five years, the campaign will address the root-cause of marine litter by targeting the production and consumption of non-recoverable and single-use plastic. By connecting individuals, civil society groups, industry and governments, UN Environment aims to transform habits, practices, standards and policies around the globe to dramatically reduce marine litter and the harm it causes. Website:

<http://www.cleanseas.org/>