



Photo: Ilan Malester

Onwards Toward Cleaner Coasts

A "Clean Coast" project promises to keep Israel's beaches litter free

Israel's open undeclared beaches - those beaches in which there are no lifeguards and bathing is forbidden - span some 130 kilometers out of Israel's 190 kilometer long Mediterranean coastal strip and 14 kilometers along the Gulf of Eilat. These coastal strips are characterized by a rich and wide diversity of flora and fauna and are a cultural, economic and environmental resource. Most importantly, they provide vital rest and recreation areas to a large part of the country's population.

Yet neglect and litter have long plagued these undeclared beaches, most of which are located within the jurisdiction of local authorities. While about a third of the waste originates at sea, the public is responsible for the other two-thirds. Some 70% of the waste left behind by vacationers consists of plastic, which may take up to 400-500 years to degrade!!! To tackle the problem, the Ministry of the Environment, in cooperation with the Nature and Parks Authority, local authorities

and the general public, launched a "Clean Coast" project on June 20, 2005. The project, targeted at keeping the country's coastlines litter free, represents the first part of an ambitious and long-term campaign aimed at keeping Israel clean. **At the request of Environment Minister Shalom Simhon, the Finance Ministry has agreed to allocate NIS 3 million a year for the next three years for the project.**

Project Components

Previous cleanup campaigns have not been successful in maintaining cleanliness along these beaches in the long term. The current project promises to be different. Within its framework, undeclared beaches will be cleaned with the joint financing of the Ministry of the Environment (70%) and local authorities (30%), and will be supplemented by education. Project components will include:

- Routine cleanups by local authorities.
- Information and publicity.
- Enforcement against polluters of the coasts.
- Educational activities in schools and youth



Improving the environment and preserving open spaces



Preventing marine and water pollution and restoring rivers



Treating life-threatening hotspots



Treating municipal, industrial and agricultural waste



Developing tools for improving service and professionalism

movements.

"Coast Watch" Volunteers

In order to enlarge the circle of participants in the "Clean Coast" project, the Ministry of the Environment has called on the public to pitch in. An initial cadre of volunteers has already been created under the guidance of the Marine and Coastal Environment Division. "Coast Watch" volunteers contribute several hours a month to the project and participate in such activities as education and enforcement on beaches on weekends, cleanup campaigns and promotion of community action.

Indicators of Success

In order to assess cleanliness levels on Israel's undeclared beaches and measure the success of the project, a clean coast index was developed. This objective parameter, based on the amount of plastic waste on the beach, aims to provide a uniform and unbiased assessment of the cleanliness level of Israel's beaches over time. In parallel, a more comprehensive "coastal rating" has been developed which ranks all of the country's undeclared beaches in terms of several indicators: water quality, frequency of cleanups, access to the coast, nature and heritage assets and public feedback.

The clean coast index is already demonstrating improvements in many of the country's undeclared beaches. In parallel, weekend information and enforcement activities in selected beaches are raising awareness of the subject.

Towards a Cleaner Coast

While it is clear that the financial aid provided by the Ministry of the Environment to local authorities should help them rid their beaches of unsightly waste, cleanups alone are not enough. Ultimate responsibility for beach cleanliness rests with the public. It is up to each and every individual to stop littering. It is up to each and every individual to ensure that the Mediterranean and Red Sea coastlines are protected not only today, but tomorrow as well.

Did You Know?

- Israel's Mediterranean coastline stretches some 190 kilometers from north to south.
- Out of the 190-kilometer long Mediterranean coastline, some 50 kilometers are closed to the public because they are used for ports, power stations, infrastructure and defense uses.
- 95 kilometers of the remaining open coastline are either built up or planned for building.
- Only 53 kilometers of open natural shores remain along Israel's Mediterranean coast.
- In 1948, when Israel was established, each citizen of Israel had 31 cm of coast; today only 2.5 cm of coast remain per citizen.
- Some 70% of the population lives along the Mediterranean coastal strip
- The Mediterranean coastline includes 87 declared beaches (with lifeguard services), spanning some 13.3 kilometers - only 6.7% of the Mediterranean coastline. Most of these beaches (about 70) are located within city bounds.
- The Mediterranean coastline includes some 130 kilometers of undeclared beaches.

Ultimate
responsibility
for beach
cleanliness
rests with the
public



*Acre beaches:
Before Cleanup. Photo: Hlilk Klosky
After Cleanup. Photo: Ilan Swissa*



RONEN ALKALAY ON THE CLEAN COAST PROJECT

Marine Inspector, Marine and Coastal Environment Division

How does this campaign differ from previous ones?

This campaign is different because it integrates both treatment and prevention and is based on a partnership between local authorities, the Ministry of the Environment, the Nature and Parks Authority and the general public.

There are three aspects to the litter problem. We know that it is easier to discard waste on a beach which is already littered than on a clean beach. It is much harder to discard a plastic bag, ice cream stick or soda can on a pristine beach. Therefore the first aspect of our campaign is to clean up our beaches. To make this happen, the Ministry of the Environment is providing financial aid to local authorities to help them clean up undeclared beaches in their jurisdiction.

Secondly, we are committed to educating the public which uses the beach. The idea is to work with them, not against them. Therefore, marine inspectors of the Ministry of the Environment along with inspectors of the Nature and Parks Authority and volunteers from the general public spend weekends on the beach, distributing garbage bags and speaking to people in an effort to drive the message home. Thus, the second aspect of the campaign is to keep the beaches clean, to stop people from littering.

The third aspect is ongoing education within the formal and informal education systems, based on the belief that in order to get long-term results we have to first focus on our youth – especially on the youngest ages between kindergarten and sixth grade. At this age children are impressionable and are ready to assimilate the message. They have no problem in turning to their parents and telling them to stop littering and clean up.

Can we point to any improvements?

We have seen improvements in many of our beaches as demonstrated by the weekly index on beach cleanliness which is published on our Hebrew website. Yet it would be arrogant for me to say that a revolution has already occurred. The task before us is long and hard. As far as I am concerned, the indicator for success will not be a cleaner beach but rather a beach where people do not litter. In the past, we put our emphasis on coastal cleanup campaigns which focused on the number of tons of garbage which were collected. Today the emphasis is on prevention. We now realize that the litter problem can only be solved by means of education targeted at changing public attitudes and behavior.

What are your hopes for the future?

We are short of human resources and our budget is inadequate, but the major problem is lack of public awareness. If we could get to every person on the beach and find the right words to impress upon him or her the importance of keeping the beach clean, we will have achieved our goal. In this respect, we are very lucky to have a dedicated group of volunteers helping us – a "Coast Watch." They come from every location and represent every sector of Israeli society. One is the daughter of a lifeguard for whom the beach was a second home since she was two years old; another is an immigrant pensioner, with a doctorate in material engineering, whose daily walks on the beach are part of his daily routine; yet another is a dentistry student studying abroad who spends his summer weekends on the beach. All share a love of the sea and a strong commitment to do something about the litter problem.

But everyone can do something about keeping our beaches clean. If every person would make just a small contribution, together we could accomplish a lot and keep our coasts clean for the benefit and pleasure of all who use them.



Improving the environment and preserving open spaces



Preventing marine and water pollution and restoring rivers



Treating life-threatening hotspots



Treating municipal, industrial and agricultural waste



Developing tools for improving service and professionalism

