

## **RONEN ALKALAY ON THE CLEAN COAST PROJECT**

*Marine Inspector, Marine and Coastal Environment, Ministry of the Environment*

**The Ministry of the Environment in cooperation with other bodies has launched coastal cleanup campaigns in the past. 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 about the subject. 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 to clean up.

**What is the role of local authorities in the campaign?**

Local authorities are responsible for the cleanliness of the beaches in their jurisdiction. At the same time, we are aware that Israel's local authorities are undergoing financial difficulties and many would rather allocate their limited funds toward education or community centers. Therefore we have offered our assistance to the mayors of coastal cities, telling them that we will help them financially by picking up 70% of the estimated cleanup costs. Most of the country's local authorities have already joined the project and are undertaking routine cleanups.

**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 plans for the rest of the year once the bathing season is over?**

Beach cleanups will continue throughout the year so that by the time the next bathing season arrives, clean beaches will greet the public. But at the same time, we will be working hard on educational programs and kits for the formal and informal school systems to make sure that the beaches remain clean. The idea is that even when the budget for this project runs out, educational programs will have already been set in motion and integrated in school curriculums.

**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. Just last week, I met an entire family walking along the beach at Ashdod with plastic bags in hand in which they collected the refuse they encountered along the way.

The Ministry of the Environment is doing all it can – in terms of education, inspection and enforcement – to clean up Israel's beaches. It is now up to the public to keep these 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.