



In March this year, Taiwan's Formosa-2 satellite captured images of an iceberg measuring more than 400 square kilometers (160 square miles) breaking off the Wilkins Ice Shelf in Antarctica. The iceberg splintered into numerous rectangular pieces of white ice drifting on the expansive, vast sea. Named after the Australian polar explorer Hubert Wilkins, who made a flight there in 1929, the shelf has floated between three large islands on the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula for hundreds of years.

Apparently, the grim reality of global warming is gnawing its way towards the earth's greatest store of frozen water.

Equally alarming is the fact that the Pacific Trash Vortex, discovered in 1997 by the American oceanographer Charles Moore, has doubled in size in 11 years time, stretching from California to Japan and covering an area twice as large as the continental United States. This vast expanse of trash, in effect the world's largest garbage dump, was estimated to contain one hundred million tons of rubbish 90 percent of which is believed to be plastic.

The floating rubbish, in addition to being detrimental to seabirds and marine life, poses a risk to human health as well. According to the Algalita Marine Research Foundation, to which Moore belongs, the plastic waste acts as a kind of chemical sponge that absorbs man-made chemicals such as hydrocarbons and the pesticide DDT. The contaminants then enter the food chain when imbibed by marine life, which in turn ends up in humans stomachs. As if to prove the findings, Taiwan's Academia Sinica has discovered goosefish whose stomachs were stuffed with plastic bags in the deep seas around the island.

It is becoming increasingly clear that it is now imperative for human beings to take action to reverse the damage we are inflicting on the earth. If we stubbornly refuse to awaken to the alarming message that our injured planet is sending us, one day it will be too late for us to do anything.

Turn back the tide



With global warming impacting the ecosystem, irregular weather patterns and natural disasters have occurred and are sure to take place more frequently in the future. Crises--including shortages of water and food, the spread of contagious diseases, and the extinction of many species--will follow, threatening the existence of all living beings.

The United Nations has made a number of efforts to tackle the crisis triggered by the global climate change. In June 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The conference drafted an international environmental treaty aimed at stabilizing greenhouse gas

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Written by Wu Hsiao-ting
Friday, 25 April 2008 00:00

concentrations in the atmosphere and hence offsetting global warming. Although the treaty as originally formulated imposed no mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions for individual nations, it did include provisions for updates that would establish mandatory emission limits. The principal update is the Kyoto Protocol, adopted at the third Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997. Over the last decade, more than 150 countries have signed the protocol in recognition of the need to do something for our environment.

According to statistics released by the Taiwan Environmental Protection Administration, the amount of carbon emissions in Taiwan increased exponentially from 1990 to 2006, making Taiwan one of the fastest-growing emitters of the toxic gas. The island now ranks 18th globally in terms of CO₂ emissions per capita, consuming 2.5 times more energy than the global average.

Evidently, as a member of the global village, we cannot ignore our duty to the world any more.

Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan have been cheerfully fulfilling their duty to the world for nearly two decades. They do what they can to live an eco-friendly life and promote the importance of environmental protection in the communities they live in. They know it is important to set a personal example before they can motivate others to do likewise, so they roll up their sleeves to pick up garbage, sort out recyclables, and reclaim reusable resources. They help decrease the consumption of plastic bags and one-use cups and dishes in markets and food stalls by carrying with them their own reusable tableware and shopping bags. They conserve water and electricity, adopt a vegetarian diet, and walk or ride a bike to reduce their carbon footprint. They try to pay attention to every detail in their daily lives to help soothe the damage we are causing to the earth.

Just do it

The continued survival of the earth now hinges so critically on the conservation of resources and the reduction of garbage that the act of recycling is becoming less and less just a virtue and more and more a necessity.



At present, Tzu Chi has 4,500 recycling stations in Taiwan alone, with more than 50,000 people certified as recycling volunteers. They show their love for the world and their respect for all living beings through concrete actions. They may not know as much as scientists regarding what global warming is doing to our planet, but they know that everyone can make a difference to our world by reducing the amount of waste and garbage. They know that everyone must lead a greener life in order to avert the global warming crisis now threatening the planet.

Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a TV for three hours; the energy saved from recycling one glass bottle can light a 100-watt light bulb for four hours; recycling 10 kilograms of steel cans can save 5.7 liters of the crude oil that is used to mine iron; one hundred kilograms of waste paper can be recycled into 75 kilograms of reprocessed paper. Knowing how

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important it is to cherish resources, Tzu Chi volunteers willingly and cheerfully dedicate themselves to the worthy cause of recycling.

Tzu Chi's recycling mission has spread beyond Taiwan to many corners of the world. There are currently 735 Tzu Chi recycling stations outside Taiwan, with 8,800 volunteers pitching in regularly. Although they inevitably encounter difficulties when promoting recycling, they are determined to overcome all obstacles because they know that human beings must take action to protect their environment in order to reverse its fate.

In Malaysia, local Chinese volunteers have made strides in their recycling efforts. They knock on every door in their neighborhoods and invite their neighbors to engage in recycling. They collect reusable resources and set up recycling stations to "turn garbage into gold." All proceeds made from the recycling are donated to the three Tzu Chi dialysis centers in Malaysia to help indigent kidney patients. Out of gratitude to Tzu Chi, many patients have even become recycling volunteers as a way to pay back.

On the following pages, we will feature the recycling efforts of the Malaysian Tzu Chi volunteers and see what impact they have made in the communities they live in. Let us hope that when everyone does their part to protect the environment, a better future for our posterity can be ensured.

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