

Environmental Protection Starts at Home

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Monday, 30 August 2010 15:32



Tzu Chi's environment mission is 20 years old and is moving its centre from the public space into the home. The volunteers at the first recycling station are working with the same enthusiasm as they did two decades ago.

It was on August 23, 1990 that, in a speech at the Shin Min Commercial & Industrial Vocational High School (Shin Min High School, in Aug. 2000) in Taichung, central Taiwan, Master Cheng Yen urged the public to begin recycling. Since then, it has spread from Taichung to 5,000 stations in 17 countries around the world, with thousands of people involved in collecting waste and sorting them in recycling stations. These also serve as community centers for elderly people, many of whom have been saved from loneliness and depression and put their time to good use.



Now the focus is shifting into the home. "We need to have this principle 'cleaning up and recycling at the source'," said Master Cheng Yen. "What does this mean? We know that, originally, plastic bottles and the mineral water inside them are clean. We need to tell our members: 'please collect clean bottles and do not let them get dirty until we come to pick them up.' That way, they will stay clean."

People are urged to use the water from laundry or that left over from washing rice to clean plastic bags, so that they can be stored at home without causing a smell or attracting bugs. Volunteers take this message to their neighbors: please wash and sort items into up to 20 categories before collection, to help the recycling stations work more efficiently.

From plastic bottles to fabric



Clean plastic bottles make higher-quality fabric; that is why nine of the 32 teams at the 2010 World Cup wore strips made from recycled PET from Taiwan. "Sorting PET bottles and removing the unwanted elements produces the purest raw material," said Huang Huade, president of Da Ai Technology. "During the production process, the raw material turns out to be the most important factor in the quality."

Volunteers also apply the same principles of recycling to kitchen waste. At the foundation's Taichung centre is a room to recycle this waste, which processes scraps and leftovers into compost and liquid fertilizer. At the centres in Banqiao and Sanchong, in suburban Taipei, the

Environmental Protection Starts at Home

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Monday, 30 August 2010 15:32

waste is turned into organic soil for growing fruit and vegetables and clear, odorless washing liquid.

At the foundation's headquarters in Hualien, the Jing Si Abode is fitted with wind, water and solar generators. "Mother Nature's energy is all around us," said Xie Weiyang, director of the foundation's Religious Culture & Humanitarian Aid Department. "And none of this is high-technology. It can all be used by anyone with a basic knowledge of physics and mechanics."

The foundation includes environmentalism in its school curriculum, with the students from its junior high school in Tainan going to the Da Ai (Great Love) farm in nearby Taishan to bend their backs and have their first experience of planting vegetables. Another way for everyone to reduce waste is to ride a bicycle, repair old clothes to make a new outfit and take re-useable eating utensils wherever they go. These are habits which the foundation teaches at its recycling stations, with the aim of changing the habits of the next generation and making the world a better place.

The first recycling station



In Taichung, where the first station was set up 20 years ago, the work is going on with the same dedication as on the first day. It was established at Liming New Village, near the vocational school where [Master Cheng Yen](#) made the original appeal. The site was donated by a local volunteer Chen Juanchai, whose aim was to keep her community as clean as her own home.

"Everyone thinks the same way," she said. "As soon as your living room becomes messy, you clean it up. Everyone does the same thing – this is how we work."

The location has changed but every afternoon residents gather to collect and sort waste for recycling. They come at 1400, when the vegetable market at Liming closes. "If you arrive late, there is no work for you," said volunteer Yan Bixia. "Everyone is vying to take part because it is fun. Sometimes we work quietly, sometimes we chat and tell jokes. But everyone works hard."

One of the veterans is Jian Sujuan, who started the work 19 years ago, after Master Cheng Yen had given a second speech on the environment in Liming in August 1991. "I believe that we can save the earth and the Master says that we can achieve this; that is what motivates us," she said. Last month Jian injured her hand but this has not stopped her from doing the work. Next to her is volunteer Chen Mingpo, who said that, as a Tzu Cheng, he had to do his recycling duty. "This is the Master's ideal. We come and do as much as we can."

In less than one hour, the volunteers have completed the recycling work. For the last 20 years, conservation has become part of the life of the community in Liming. It is a commitment which everyone believes to be worthy of their time and effort.

[The Most Beautiful Hands](#)