

Environmental protection worldwide: Less waste in Thailand's rivers

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14/09/2023 The Ferry Porsche Foundation, the Audi Environmental Foundation and the green start-up everwave have joined forces again, this time to help rid the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok of waste.

A high-tech garbage collection boat from Germany has spent the last few months removing tons of waste from Bangkok's Chao Phraya River as part of a campaign by the Ferry Porsche Foundation, the Audi Environmental Foundation and the green start-up everwave. The project partners are aiming to establish in the medium term a stable infrastructure for waste processing in the region around the Thai capital, by working with the TerraCycle Thai Foundation, a local non-governmental organisation.

The CollectiX boat uses drones, cameras and AI to detect and collect large piles of trash and transport

them to shore for sorting and processing by a team from the NGO. Since May, 20 to 30 tons of rubbish has been removed from the river each month.

The building of sustainable infrastructures

"Our oceans are an ecological miracle. They are among our most important living resources," says Sebastian Rudolph, Chairman of the Board of the Ferry Porsche Foundation. "This is why we need to protect them in the long term, and that requires strategic, cross-border projects, for clean waters and a future worth living."

Cooperation with local institutions has proved to be crucial. “A lot of the plastic in the Chao Phraya comes from open landfills in the region,” says everwave CEO Clemens Feigl. “So, it’s not enough to simply fish the garbage from the river. We need to address the root causes. That’s why our cooperation with the TerraCycle Thai Foundation is so important. We are supporting facilities for sorting and recycling. And in the long term, we want to establish collection points and containers too.” The five-month collaboration is kick-starting everwave's long-term Cleanup in Bangkok project.

Rivers are "plastic highways"

This initiative marks the second time that the Ferry Porsche Foundation has joined forces with the Audi Environmental Foundation and everwave to combat waste in rivers.

From the Chao Phraya, about 385 tons of plastic flows into the Gulf of Thailand, 35 kilometres west of the capital, every year. The project partners are hoping to highlight the fact that rivers like this act as “plastic highways”, meaning that carelessly discarded litter finds its way into the water before being swept out to the open sea. The campaign is therefore being accompanied by environmental education measures. In spring, for example, the Ferry Porsche Foundation called on schools and non-profit organisations from Baden-Württemberg and Saxony to clean up their own neighborhoods. Twenty-one school classes and 11 non-profit organisations pitched in and together removed more than a ton of waste from their local environment.

A quantum leap for efficiency

Two Thai boatmen have been hired to work on the CollectiX boat, and two more are being trained. For the local NGOs, cooperating with the initiative from Germany means a quantum leap in efficiency. Before the boat was working in the water, members of the TerraCycle Thai Foundation pulled garbage from the river by hand or with fishing nets. It is hoped that the attention that the boat has been garnering on the river can be used to attract other partners who, in the long term, could establish sustainable structures for waste avoidance and recycling. “If it goes well, the Chao Phraya could be trash-free in 10-20 years,” hopes Clemens Feigl.

About the Audi Environmental Foundation

The Audi Environmental Foundation GmbH is an active supporter of new technology and scientific methods for a livable future. The Foundation's goal is to contribute to environmental protection and create and promote ways of acting sustainably. The Foundation focuses in particular on the promotion and development of environmentally friendly technology, environmental education measures, and the protection of the natural life resources of people, animals and plants. It was founded in 2009 by AUDI AG as a 100 per cent subsidiary and is a part of its commitment to social and environmental issues.

About everwave

everwave works to clean up the environment: its garbage collection boats prevent waste from entering the oceans. Artificial intelligence assists the clean-up missions to detect and analyse waste. The collected material is then recycled through environmentally friendly processes, and, in addition, the public is made aware of environmental issues. For example, the start-up uses its technology in Serbia, Romania, and Cambodia to help ensure clean waters. To date, everwave has collected more than one million kilograms of waste from rivers.

About the Ferry Porsche Foundation

Founded in 2018, the Ferry Porsche Foundation supports and initiates charitable projects in social affairs, environment, education and academics, culture and sports. Above all, the Foundation aims to support young people through social engagement at the company locations of Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche AG. Its name comes from Ferry Porsche, who founded the sports car manufacturer Porsche in 1948.

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Florian Laudan

Vice President Communications, Sustainability and Politics
+49 (0) 711 / 911 21469
florian.laudan@porsche.de

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Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart