

## Changing Himalayas

Suzanne Goldenberg reports  
from the roof of the world



# Calls for long-term Everest waste management plan – starting with toilets

Nepalese government urged to install portable toilets at Everest base camp, and devise strategy to keep region clean

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Suzanne Goldenberg in Kathmandu

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The Saving Mount Everest Clean-Up Expedition team bring over 8 tonnes of rubbish from Mount Everest and its trekking trails Photograph: savingmouteverest.org

A Nepali environmental group is petitioning the government in Kathmandu to put portable toilets on the top of the world – Everest base camp – as part of a new management plan for the high-altitude region.

The environmental group, Eco Himal, argues public toilets would make it easier to maintain a clean environment at base camp, which sees dozens of climbing expeditions a year.

It is also proposing public toilets at other popular peaks in the Everest region such as Pumori, Ama Dablam, and Island Peak, said Eco Himal's director, Phinjo Sherpa.

Everest base camp, a rocky plateau at 5,300m that is the starting point for climbing expeditions, has for years been the focus of clean-up operations after a series of stinging reports in the 1990s about rubbish and filth in what had once been pristine environments.

This year, Eco Himal led a push to recover 8,000kg of rubbish from base camp as well as Camp 1 and 2 – including the wreckage from an Italian helicopter crash.

But Sherpa argued that such sporadic clean-up efforts – though well-meaning – do not go far enough.

His organisation is pressing the government to develop a broader management plan that would set aside adequate funds to conserve the Everest region.

"Everybody talks about waste in the mountains but nobody talks about proper

solutions," Sherpa said. "Cleaning up Everest every once in a while does not help. The main thing is management, waste management."

Expeditions have already made great strides to reduce their impact on Everest, carting away rubbish and swapping solar panels for conventional generators.

But Sherpa argued that portable toilets would make it easier for the organisations overseeing clean-up at base camp to deal with the problem of human waste.

"During the season time, there are thousands of climbers and most of the expeditions have toilet tents with barrels up there. But porters and others who need them normally just go back and forth," he said.

"Having one or two toilets in the base camp could solve this problem."

However, the proposal has critics even within the coalition trying to develop the sustainable management plan for Everest.

Wangchhu Sherpa, president of the Everest Summiters Association, which is also trying to press the Nepal government to do more for the region, said his group did not support the proposal.

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