

Press release “Start research on the Bubble Barrier’s caught waste by the Plastic Soup Foundation”

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What does the Bubble Barrier in Amsterdam get out of the water?

AMSTERDAM, September 15, 2020 – In the run-up to this Saturday’s World Cleanup Day 2020 a research alliance into the plastic catch of the Bubble Barrier at the Westerdok in Amsterdam is announced. The Plastic Soup Foundation has partnered with Dutch start-up The Great Bubble Barrier to assist with research to help prevent ocean pollution. Plastic found in Amsterdam’s canals could hold the key to better prevention of pollution. The Great Bubble Barrier has created a bubble screen that removes plastic from Amsterdam’s canals to stop it flowing into the North Sea. The Plastic Soup Foundation is in the process of examining this captured canal plastic on behalf of the Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht.

Plastic Soup Foundation is looking into which items are being caught by the Bubble Barrier; how much plastic is caught; which brands are common and whether the waste can be traced back to its source. This is important information to effectively prevent plastic waste entering the canals in the future. For example, the data could inform conversations with producers about alternatives to disposable plastic packaging and a rapid introduction of a deposit on cans.

This Saturday is World Cleanup Day 2020 when volunteers remove as much litter as possible on land, although environmental campaigners believe a ban on certain disposable products and a switch to sustainable packaging is the best way to fight against plastic soup.

Why this research?

The Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht, in collaboration with Amsterdam Plastic Smart City (a program of the municipality of Amsterdam), has been looking for a solution for the floating plastic and smaller plastic waste that remains behind in the canal water despite the garbage boats of Waternet.

With the Bubble Barrier, there is an excellent opportunity to know how much waste it collects on average and what products end up in the catchment system. The trial period with the Bubble Barrier bubble screen in Amsterdam will last three years. The research is aimed at gathering information about the functioning of the bubble screen and to help determine whether a bubble screen should be placed at other locations as well.

Sander Mager, director at the Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht, says:

“Plastic in our water is an increasing problem, also for the work of the Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht. It has drastic effects on the quality of our water and thus on everything that lives in or near the water. Therefore, it is important that the Regional Water Authority collaborates with other parties to make a fist against this urgent problem. The innovative Bubble Barrier in Amsterdam is a good and important example of this.”

What does the research look like?

With the help of a team of volunteers, the waste collected by the Bubble Barrier bubble screen is dried, sorted and analysed for over a year. The waste is categorised within the so-called OSPAR method. There are more than 100 OSPAR categories within this method, which will provide valuable information when the monitoring period has ended. Not only will knowledge on the functioning of the Bubble Barrier bubble screen be gained, but also about the many sources, the kind of plastic pollution and the variations of plastic waste per season.

Although the corona measures postponed the start of the monitoring research, the collected waste was already kept separate for several months. During the lockdown, very few people have been in the public space and major public events such as King's Day and The Pride have been cancelled. It is expected these exceptional circumstances will influence the analysis of the collected waste.

Bubble Barrier Amsterdam Westerdok

The bubble screen at the Westerdok was installed in November 2019 by The Great Bubble Barrier on behalf of the Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht and the municipality of Amsterdam. Providing clean water is a core task of the water authority. Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht, municipality and Plastic Soup Foundation previously worked together in the "Amsterdam Clean Water" covenant, which aims to provide clean water without plastic in Amsterdam and to prevent the outflow of plastic from the Amsterdam canals to the open sea. The Westerdok in the Western Docklands is one end of Amsterdam's monumental canal belt and an exit to the IJ river.

How does the Bubble Barrier work?

The Bubble Barrier is a screen of air bubbles created by pumping air through a perforated tube that lies at the bottom of a canal or river. The bubble screen creates an upward flow which directs waste to the surface. By placing the bubble screen diagonally in the Westerdok, it makes use of the natural flow of the canal. This way, the plastic waste will be directed to the side and into the catchment system at the quay. Here it will be retained and removed from the water. The collected waste is removed from the water at least two times a week by Waternet. The Bubble Barrier bubble screen works 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, does not hinder shipping, is fish-friendly and can be used over the entire width of a canal or river.

Note to editors

You can find animations, illustrations and our logos via the link below:

<http://tiny.cc/kx4udz>

Further image material, film or interview requests are negotiable upon request with one of the collaborating parties:

The Great Bubble Barrier

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Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht (Waterschap Amstel, Gooi en Vecht)

Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht (Waterschap Amstel, Gooi en Vecht) work in an area where more than 1.3 million people live. Its area is located in the provinces Noord-Holland, Utrecht and a small part of Zuid-Holland. Waternet provides services on behalf of the Regional Water Authority Amstel, Gooi and Vecht and the City of Amsterdam. Waternet is the only water company in the Netherlands that takes care of the entire water cycle.

www.agv.nl

The Great Bubble Barrier

The Great Bubble Barrier's mission is to clear rivers and canals from plastic and thereby prevent pollution in the ocean to protect the global ecosystem. Its bubble screen, the Bubble Barrier, catches plastic without hindering fishing or shipping in rivers. Earlier pilots have already shown that the Bubble Barrier successfully captures macroplastics larger from 1 mm and catches on average 86% of the test material. The Great Bubble Barrier company was the winner of the Plastic Free Rivers Makathon 2016, initiated by PWN and Rijkswaterstaat and the winner of the international Green Challenge 2018.

www.thegreatbubblebarrier.com

Plastic Soup Foundation

The Plastic Soup Foundation was founded in 2011 and aims to create awareness among everyone with the phenomenon of the plastic soup and to stop it at its source. Plastic Soup Foundation is a single-issue organization and focuses entirely on plastic. With a small, committed and driven team of around twenty people, we work hard every day towards the central goal: no plastic in our water and our body. The organization is based in Amsterdam but has international operations. The organization's mission is supported not only in the Netherlands, but also in the United States, the United Kingdom and India.

www.plasticsoupfoundation.org

Amsterdam Plastic Smart City

In 2019, the municipality of Amsterdam - the first major city in the world to do so - signed with the WWF and the Plastic Soup Foundation a letter of intent in which they indicated their desire to become plastic smart. The Amsterdam Plastic Smart City program's mission is: "we will achieve a city without plastic pollution by 2030".

The program has four main themes: "doing smart together", "smartly using plastic", "getting rid of plastic (litter) waste in a smart way" and "exploring smart, learning and becoming aware".