

Clean up Everest

Shiva Raj Mishra*

Health Prospect

The Everest climbing season was opened this year on August, after the tragic earthquakes which shut down the climbing for months (1). The Nepalese Government is attracting more climbers by slashing fees but this is expected to create heavy traffic and increase concern for garbage-dumping.

Since the first ascent of Everest in 1953, 4000 people have climbed Everest (2), and 200 died. Decades of climbing has left tons of wastes. While there are toilet facilities at the base camp, none of other camps up to the summit have any toilets. Climbers dig holes in ice for toileting and leave their faeces and urine behind. Some throw the wastes in glaciers crevasses. In Everest's icy weather, wastes do not decompose. Glaciers and resulting rivers carry human waste risking contamination of water downstream.

The Nepalese government recently imposed rules requiring that climbers bring 8 kg of garbage, apart from their own trash. Climbers will be charged a penalty from their deposit if they fail to comply (3), however no positive incentives exists to motivate people to comply. Monitoring these rules in world's highest mountain seems challenging.

Portable public toilets if installed at all camps serve both for toileting needs and waste collection. The Government should ensure that climbers have enough plastic bags for waste collection, or provide disposable bags. A waste collection plan for bringing waste back to basecamp should be a prerequisite for approval and certification of climbing. Initiatives like Clean up Everest Expedition, which has so far safely disposed of 5000 kilos of waste collected from Everest, should be promoted (4).

Mountaineering training should include training of toileting. Moreover, keeping Everest clean should be a responsibility, rather than a choice, and should be a part of climbing ethics, so that the fragile mountain ecosystem of Himalayas is sustained forever healthy.

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*Correspondence:

shivrajmishra@gmail.com

Health Prospect,
Maharajgunj, Kathman-
du, Nepal.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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