

KERATAN AKHBAR



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Illegal waste dumping is a highly immoral act

WATER, as we all know, is the source of life. So everybody knows that we have to do everything within our means to protect, safeguard and maintain our precious water resources. And yet, we know of many instances when we have been downright careless, wasteful and irresponsible with water.

The media is full of stories of the consequences of our neglect in protecting this God-given resource, consequences that are causing hardship and misery for people.

It is high time to get serious. For far too long we Malaysians have been lackadaisical in all aspects of protecting our water resources – from protecting the sources and enforcement of laws relating to water security to wasteful use of water and polluting rivers.

The odour pollution incident at the Sungai Semenyih Water Treatment Plant earlier this week that caused a disruption of supply to 1.5 million people in the Klang Valley is something that must not recur. To date, the Sungai

Semenyih plant has been closed several times since 2006. Each time, illegal waste disposal has been quoted as the main culprit.

No, this latest incident isn't the first time such irresponsible acts have been detected. And it isn't the first time that the authorities have promised action. This isn't the first time that enforcement has been weak. This isn't the first time that we've heard excuses for nonaction. And I dare say, it won't be long before there is a repeat of such irresponsibility if the bitter lessons are not learnt.

It is time for the government to act hand-in-hand with the public to put a stop to perpetrators who cause such massive inconvenience and hardship. An unlawful act that is repeatedly committed shows the guilty parties have a total disregard for law and the authorities.

The Environmental Quality Act 1974, Act 127, should be tightened. Parties involved should face deterrent punishment. Better still, these parties should be made to compen-

sate consumers. A law to terminate the license of such irresponsible waste disposal operators should also be enforced with immediate effect. The consequence of breaking the law with illegal dumping should be clearly put across to all organisations and companies dealing with chemicals and wastes.

It is also vitally important to educate the public on how a sewerage waste water treatment plant works.

It is a misconception that any sort of illegal waste dumped into the waste water treatment facility will be flushed automatically. As such, with proper awareness, the public can play an important role (as in the case of Sungai Semenyih, where the illegal dumping happened in a residential area) in reporting such incidents to the relevant authorities.

Proper hotlines should also be established and the public should be informed of such numbers. A one-stop complaint centre would also be a possible solution.

Government departments such as the Department of the Environment and SPAN (National Water Services Commission) should also ensure that all companies handling chemical wastes declare the types of chemicals and other types of potential environmental pollutants used in their processes.

By maintaining a current list, tracing back chemical pollutants to their source may become easier. As an indirect effect, these companies will also feel the presence of the authorities when it comes to the discharge of waste. Illegal factories should be tracked down and shut down.

Illegal waste dumping is a highly immoral act done by selfish individuals. With proper enforcement and a detailed plan of action, we hope that such actions will not be repeated in the near future.

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