

Water is a priceless commodity – treat it that way

STUDIES in Malaysia and many other countries have shown that harvesting rainwater or using grey water meets the objectives of releasing precious treated water for potable use.

A lot of research has been done on rainwater harvesting and many guidelines have been developed such as the Urban Stormwater Management Manual for Malaysia (2001) and the Guidelines for Installing a Rainwater Collection and Utilisation System (1999).

Normally, rainwater is collected directly from roofs and other purpose-built catchments.

Archeological evidence shows that capturing of rainwater dates back as far as 6,000 years. But technologies in water treatment and supply systems have resulted in this age-old but sustainable way of using water being ignored or forgotten.

Based on researches and studies done, rainwater harvesting can effectively reduce the water bill by 20% to 30%, and in some cases up to 60%. Imagine the amount of money and water which can be saved if the whole country is to implement this system.

Instead of using rainwater, we are using treated water to wash cars, flush toilets, and water plants. This is such a waste when in some countries, such as in Africa, people are struggling to get a mouthful of clean water.

Decades of unsustainable development has led to what experts term as a humanitarian crisis – global warming and climate change.

Erratic weather results in unpredictable rainfall patterns and Malaysia has experienced unexpected prolonged droughts – recently in Sarawak and Sabah. This has caused water stress in these states.

In Malaysia, there are several factors posing obstacles for implementation and development of rainwater harvesting system.

The first factor is with the copious amount of rainfall – people think that Malaysia has rich water resources.

Second, the frequent flooding gives the impression that it is unnecessary to harvest rainfall.

Third, a single approach in managing water supply i.e Water Demand Management instead of Integrated Water Demand Management.

Fourth, low water tariffs make it uneconomical to install rainwater mechanisms.

Fifth, lack of incentives to include rainwater harvesting in building design.

Last but not least, lack of mandatory regulation to enforce rainwater harvesting system for both commercial and domestic buildings.

With these obstacles removed, rainwater harvesting will save consumers and the water supply service providers a lot of money and resources.

But rain water harvesting system is not the answer to our water woes. Preventing pollution of water sources and catchments are of utmost importance to protect our water supply for the present and future generations.