

# A drain on our resources

## Millions spent to clean up rubbish which cause clogging

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Millions of ringgit go down the drain every year to clean up the waterways that are choked with rubbish.

People throw everything into the drain, right down to literally the kitchen sink.

This habit, which results in clogged drains unable to function when it rains, sees water being released into surrounding land.

Clogged drains have been identified as one of the major factors causing frequent flash floods in urban areas.

Government agencies and local councils face yearly battles to clean up the drains.

Government sources said more than RM40mil was spent annually to clean up monsoon drains nationwide.

While tissue paper and cigarette butts were commonly found in drains, people sometimes even throw mattresses into large monsoon drains, said Drainage and Irrigation Department senior director Datuk Zainor Rahim Ibrahim.

The department manages large monsoon drains while local councils take care of the smaller drains within their jurisdiction.

Zainor Rahim told *The Star* that the cost of cleaning rubbish and maintaining the drains could easily come up to millions of ringgit in taxpayers' money, and that such amounts could have been better spent on other projects benefiting society.



**A load of rubbish:** Local community members clearing the rubbish from the Sungei Way river in Petaling Jaya.

"A simple act of throwing rubbish in a designated area as well as recycling can make a huge difference in preventing clogged drains and, eventually, floods," Zainor Rahim said.

He conceded that with more development in areas such as Klang Valley, many drains built during the colonial era were no longer large enough to meet the demands of dense new housing areas.

"The department has taken steps to widen the drains in stages but clogged drains are making it more difficult," he said.

The Sultan of Selangor, in an interview in December, had called for a comprehensive action plan to

tackle floods in the state and in the Klang Valley, saying piecemeal actions were no longer effective as rain patterns became more unpredictable.

Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah added that the public must also play their part by not throwing rubbish into drains.

Terengganu Drainage and Irrigation Department director Mat Hussin Ghani said more than RM2mil was spent on cleaning drains in six districts.

"We discovered strange items during our maintenance such as furniture, pillows and even a kitchen sink ... we can expect almost anything down there," he said.

Mat Hussin added that the amount of rubbish seemed to increase each year, as people were insensitive to the fact that rubbish disrupts smooth water flow, contributing to flash floods.

Petaling Jaya City Council public relations officer Zainon Zakaria said about RM1mil was spent in cleaning up drains as well as repairing broken ones last year.

She added that the city council had to deal with commercial waste, such as cooking oil, which was dumped into the drains.

"People must change their habits. If not, no matter how much cleaning up we do, the problem will continue," she said.