

Incinerator not the answer

Govt should sort out jurisdiction, enforcement and waste contractor issues

IN MY last column, I highlighted how over-development caused a shortage of water supply for Klang Valley folk even though studies predicted the supply would last until 2050.

The large population growth in our cities also puts pressure on numerous other resources and facilities, one of which is waste management.

The Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) allocated RM164mil for cleaning services (which includes household waste removal) in 2014, while the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) allocated RM57mil for the same thing in 2012.

Even though the sum seems huge, these figures only deal with domestic waste for landed property. Rubbish from industries, private commercial buildings and stratified properties are not covered under local council budgets for waste removal.

Also not covered is construction waste, which comes from demolished old buildings and development of new buildings.

Yet, rubbish is something we must deal with, and where there is demand, there is supply. Anyone with a lorry can become a waste removal contractor as there are no special licences required for the transport of waste under the law, except for toxic waste.

"Landfills are properly managed and maintained to prevent leachate and waste from entering our environment and water system. To do this, they charge a tipping fee, which is based on the amount of waste you bring in," said Hi-Tech Waste Management executive director David Zon.

Hi-Tech estimates the average cost for a 16-tonne lorry transporting waste to a proper landfill at about RM372 per trip, taking into account the distance of a landfill from urban areas, the toll charges, petrol, truck rental and tipping fees.

This is hardly surprising as proper landfills are located between 20km and 50km from the city, depending on where you start your journey from.

Since it is expensive to properly dispose of waste, and since any lorry owner can cart waste, it is not uncommon for contractors to dump the rubbish along riverbanks or a secluded area instead of taking that rubbish to a landfill.

Government statistics place the generation of municipal solid waste at around 6,000 to 7,000 tonnes a day in the Klang Valley.

The Bukit Tagar landfill processes 2,200 to 2,500 tonnes of waste from Kuala Lumpur.

Jeram Sanitary Landfill handles 2,100 to 2,600 tonnes of waste a day from Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya and Klang. A small landfill in Tanjung Duabelas, Sepang, handles around 400 to 600 tonnes a day. This means that several hundred tonnes per day is not accounted for. Furthermore, a whopping 25,000 tonnes of construction and industrial waste are generated each day.

Much of this waste goes unaccounted because developers and factory owners are not required to declare to the local council how they dispose of their rubbish.

All this illegally dumped rubbish cause problems such as ground river pollution, river and lake pollution, air pollution (open burning) and land contamination, and makes the area a fire hazard.

But because such activities are reported periodically in the media and mostly out of sight for the majority of the populace, the cause of the problem is never addressed.

The crime perpetuates partly because there is little enforcement and regulation for illegal dumping.

The Solid Waste Management and Cleansing Act 2007 was supposed to regulate waste management and enforcement activities for peninsular Malaysia, but Selangor, Perak and Penang opted out when the law was finally



Shameful: Unscrupulous parties have been dumping construction and domestic waste into Sungai Kelang. — filepic

enforced in 2011.

Where this law allows persons to be fined up to RM100,000 for illegal dumping, local by-laws only cover the responsibilities of the property owners. It does not deal with the contractors at all.

When local authorities are called out about the mess, they instinctively pass the buck to another government agency.

If the rubbish was dumped on a riverbank, the problem belongs to the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID).

If the rubbish was dumped in a forested area, it is the Environment Department's problem (DOE).

Both the DID and DOE just point back at the local council.

After all the finger-pointing, the waste is either removed to a proper landfill or covered, but such solutions are done at taxpayers' expense with no one held accountable for the mess.

Instead of addressing issues of jurisdiction, enforcement and waste contractor management for the waste disposal industry, the Federal Government is looking at constructing an incinerator in Kepong while the Selangor government has expressed interest to build three incinerators within the state.

It is unlikely contractors that dump rubbish illegally will suddenly start using the incinerator because the cost of disposing waste at an incinerator is expected to be a lot more expensive than maintaining a proper sanitary landfill.

This is because our domestic waste is 45% food waste and generally wet. To burn our rubbish, it has to be dried first, or fuel has to be added.

The ash that results from the burning is also toxic and has to be treated and stored, which is an additional cost. Incinerators also cannot deal with construction waste that is being churned out by all our development projects.

In fact, DBKL has no reason to build the incinerator in Kepong because the Bukit Tagar landfill has a capacity of 120 million tonnes of waste and is expected to serve the waste disposal needs of Kuala Lumpur for the next 50 years.

So why are both federal and state governments looking at incinerator technology when it appears to be not economically viable?

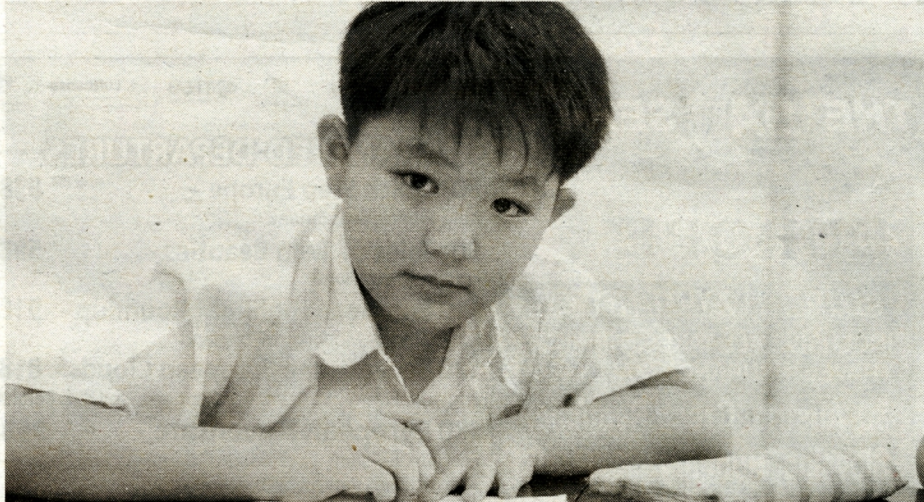
More importantly, why are there no plans to deal with the rubbish that is not accounted for and ends up in our environment?

COUNCIL MATTERS
by KW Mak



■ Mak Khuin Weng remembers the first rubbish story he did was about rubbish bins that cost RM1,000 each, purchased by MBPJ in 2006.

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