

Rivers of filth and garbage

Pollution a contributing factor to current water shortage

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KUALA LUMPUR: About 300,000 tonnes of garbage, enough to fill 110 Olympic-sized swimming pools, are being dumped into rivers yearly and the constant pollution is adding to the prolonged water shortage.

Besides the usual floating rubbish tied in plastic bags and polystyrene food containers, the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) has also found all sorts of junk, including old fridges, discarded mattresses and kitchen utensils, in rivers.

According to the department's river basin and coastal management division director, Datuk Lim Chow Hock, the recent dry spell had reduced the volume of water in rivers, making the water quality even worse.

"When there is less water content, the quality gets worse as dilution of the pollutants is not possible. Pollution is a contributing factor to the current water shortage," he said.

Lim said that although the main reason for the shortage was the extended dry spell, polluted rivers meant less water could be pumped into the treatment plants.

"If there is an oil spill for example, the cost to treat the water at the

Most polluted rivers in Peninsular Malaysia

Lowest water quality

- Sungai Ayer Merah (Johor)
- Sungai Tukau Batu (Johor)
- Sungai Sengkuang (Johor)
- Sungai Jelutong (Penang)

Highest amount of rubbish

- Sungai Klang (Selangor)
- Sungai Tebrau (Johor)
- Sungai Skudai (Johor)
- Sungai Pinang (Penang)

Dead rivers

- Sungai Segget (Johor)
- Sungai Ayer Merah (Johor)
- Sungai Jelutong (Penang)
- Sungai Juru (Penang)
- Sungai Prai (Penang)

Source: Dept. of Environment & Drainage and Irrigation Dept.

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plant will be extremely high. If there are toxic elements in the water, the cost of production will shoot up and our plants would not be able to handle this, resulting in supply being affected," he said.

Pollution has already led to five rivers – Sungai Segget and Sungai

Ayer Merah in Johor, and Sungai Jelutong, Sungai Juru and Sungai Prai in Penang – being classified as "dead" as they are unable to sustain any form of life, including fish and aquatic plants.

But the dirtiest river in the country, in terms of the amount of rub-

bish found, is the 120km-long Sungai Klang. An estimated 77,000 tonnes of garbage are dumped into it each year.

The Federal Government has allocated RM4bil to clean up Sungai Klang and its tributaries under the 10-year River of Life (ROL) project, which began last year.

Its targets include the installation of 69 gross pollutant traps (GPTs) by Kuala Lumpur City Hall and another 359 GPTs, log booms and trash rakes by the DID.

GPTs are filters that catch pollutants before they enter waterways. The six categories of pollutants found in rivers are rubbish from housing and squatter areas, construction waste, silt from land clearing, oil and grease from restaurants, sillage or organic waste, mostly from wet markets, and industrial waste from factories and workshops.

Lim said many people felt that they were not responsible for river pollution if they did not throw rubbish directly into the rivers.

"But they do not realise that the rubbish they discard by the roadsides also ends up in the drains and then in the rivers," he said, adding that the discharge of raw sewage into rivers was also a problem in some small old towns.

Over RM25mil spent on cleaning rivers in three years

KUALA LUMPUR: More than RM25mil has been spent over the past three years to clean up polluted rivers in the country.

For Sungai Klang, the cleaning has to be done daily because of the large amount of garbage and rubbish dumped upstream. For most other rivers and tributaries, maintenance cleaning is done weekly or monthly.

Drainage and Irrigation Department's river basin and coastal management division director Datuk Lim Chow Hock said the cost of cleaning varied, depending on how polluted a river is.

The four most polluted rivers, based on the volume of rubbish thrown in, are Sungai Klang, Sungai Tebrau, Sungai Skudai and Sungai Pinang.

From 2006 to next year, the Federal Government has allocated RM114mil to rehabilitate rivers,

under the "One State One River" programme, which is targeted at the most polluted rivers.

Lim said as most people in Sabah and Sarawak refrained from throwing rubbish into the drains, rivers were not so polluted there.

"It all boils down to having the right attitude and being civic-minded when disposing rubbish," he added.

The Department of Environment, in its 2012 River Water Quality report, listed 34 rivers under the "polluted" category, based on water quality. Out of the 473 rivers in Malaysia monitored, 161 rivers were deemed "slightly polluted" while the rest were classified as "clean".

Johor had the most under the category of polluted rivers with 18, followed by Penang with nine, Malacca and Kelantan (two each), followed by Kedah, Perak, Terengganu and Selangor (one each).



Waterway eyesore: Garbage found along Sungai Prai.