Unit Komunikasi Korporat

KERATAN AKHBAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	NEW STRAITS TIMES			
TARIKH	:	24/12/2019	MUKA SURAT	:	2
JABATAN	:	KATS / SPAN / AIR SELANGOR			
KLASIFIKASI	:	**PERHATIAN**			

'SLEEPING ON THE JOB'

WATER WOES LINKED TO APATHY, LACK OF WILLPOWER

Fomca takes to task govt and others responsible for not having action plan



THE lackadaisical attitude of government departments, agencies and officers towards protecting water resources needs to be addressed in tackling the spate of water disruptions.

Klang Valley residents are no strangers to water cuts, having experienced three episodes this year.

Following each episode, experts were quick to point out the lack of enforcement and need for stiffer punishment, yet their advice appears to fall on deaf ears as authorities fail to heed calls to put in place a comprehensive action plan to act against the perpetrators.

The Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations, when contacted by the *New Straits Times* yesterday to comment on the Sungai Semenyih water treatment plant pollution, said the problem was because "people are sleeping on the job".

Its chief operating officer, Saravanan Thambirajah, who is Water and Energy Consumer Association of Malaysia president, said the issue could have been prevented if the areas concerned were under constant surveillance, especially during the rainy season.

It was high time for the government and relevant bodies to step up enforcement and monitoring of river banks and water catchment areas, he said.

"The problem is they are not doing that. If they are, I don't think we will have this issue. They should be aware of hotspots where culprits dump chemicals or waste.

"During the rainy season, businesses will dump illegal waste into the river. If the authorities look into the statistics, it will show that this happens every year.



Saravanan Thambirajah

"That means somebody is sleeping on the job. If they really monitor, they can identify the affected areas, time frame of river pollution, type of chemical found and identify the culprits.

"The problem is the government does not have the willpower to go after these culprits."

Saravanan said the government should have a strategy to tackle this problem, such as setting up a task force and a national council for water protection.

Among the parties concerned are Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Ministry; Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry; Department of Environment; state governments; and, other local authorities.

"Consumer groups have been pressuring the relevant parties about this issue since the 1990s. They have been listening and talking, but I don't see any move beyond that.

"For example, does the ministry or agencies have a 10-year plan to protect water catchment areas?"

He called on the government to make public the names of the perpetrators and companies that dump toxic waste into rivers and have their licences revoked.

"Stricter punishment and a higher penalty should be imposed.

"The law is supposed to protect consumers, but if there is no enforcement, how will people be protected? How will these rivers be protected?"

He said consumers affected by the water supply disruption should be given discounts.

"When we pay our water bills, we expect to see water when we turn on the taps. Now, if that cannot be delivered, of course, consumers have to be given discounts.

"It is a burden for consumers each time there are water cuts as they look for water sources, carry pails of water home and to high-rise buildings.

"Frequent water disruption is enough reason why the IWK sewage and water bill should not be merged.

"Fomca is against the idea of merging the bill, as at the end of the day, consumers will be

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People queuing up to get water from a water tank truck in Subang Jaya yesterday. PIC BY AZIAH AZMEE

'Manhole covers can be opened by anyone'

KAJANG: Checks showed that the manholes in Bandar Bukit Mahkota here, which were believed to have been used by unscrupulous parties to dispose of chemical waste, are accessible to the public.

Berita Harian reported that its checks in Jalan BM 7/10 here revealed two access roads that could be used to enter the area.

The access points were unguarded, as they formed part of a residential area.

However, many of the houses were under construction and appear to have been abandoned. The area is overrun with weeds and undergrowth.

Based on observations, the remoteness of the area means it would not be difficult for anyone to carry out dumping undetected and without drawing suspicion.

The area also served as a dumping ground for construction material, old furniture and domestic waste. Also seen was evidence of open burning.

A maintenance worker, who declined to be named, said the manhole covers could be opened by anyone.

"For us workers, we use a special tool to open the manhole to conduct work inside. However, anyone can do so if he uses a crowbar.

"I suppose this is how some people avoid properly and legally disposing of their chemical waste, which could run into thousands of ringgit," said the worker.

On Sunday, Indah Water Konsortium (IWK) said it would seal all manholes in the areas near its water treatment plant in Bandar Bukit Mahkota to prevent incidences of chemical dumping.

Selangor Environment, Green Technology and Consumer Affairs Committee chairman Hee Loy Sian was quoted as saying that IWK had agreed to permanently seal around 20 manholes in the area.

The Kajang Municipal Council and IWK have been instructed to conduct 24-hour patrols at entry and exit points in the area. Police have also been asked to patrol the areas to keep out trespassers.

Hee had said while the area around the treatment plant was largely abandoned, its sewage treatment infrastructure was complete.

He said in the future, closed-circuit television cameras would be installed to boost security.

the victims."

He said the government had failed to live up to its promises.

Pakatan Harapan had, in its 14th General Election manifesto, pledged to resolve Selangor's water issue within 100 days of coming into power.

"They promised that water services would be improved, but it has only gotten worse.

"Consumers are the ones who are suffering. People will celebrate Christmas in a day, and they are worried whether they are going to get water."

He also said the water crisis should not be politicised and the ruling coalition and opposition should work together to resolve the issue.

"Should the government fail to act on this water disruption, it will be no surprise if we see a change in government in the next general election.

"Water is a fundamental need for consumers. This is going to have a huge effect on all."

The Sungai Semenyih water treatment plant was forced to shut down completely yesterday due to odour pollution, caused by parties who disposed of illegal toxic waste with solvent odours into IWK sewage manholes in Bandar Bukit Mahkota.

Following the closure, 336,930 consumer accounts in Petaling, Hulu Langat, Kuala Langat and Sepang have been affected.

MB: Impose heavier penalties on perpetrators

DENGKIL: Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari has urged Putrajaya to take stronger measures against those found guilty of polluting the country's water supply.

He said punishments were inadequate to punish those responsible for such acts.

"We hope the energy, science, technology, environment and climate change minister will impose heavier penalties on culprits," he said after visiting the Tasik Idaman pond here yesterday.

Selangor Water Management Authority (LUAS) is pumping water from Tasik Idaman to Sungai Semenyih to stabilise and dilute the odour caused by the pollution.

On Saturday, the water treatment plant was forced to shut down due to odour pollution, caused by people illegally disposing of chemical waste at the inlet around the Indah Water Konsortium (IWK) plant.

An estimated 1.5 million people were affected by the disruption.

Amirudin said harsher punishments were needed as water disruptions due to pollution happened too frequently.

Under the Environmental Quality Act 1974, those found guilty of such offences can be fined a maximum of RM500,000 and be jailed for no more than five years.

He said the culprits behind the incident had yet to be identified.

In May, Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Minister Yeo Bee Yin said the government aimed to replace the Environmental Quality Act 1974 with a new act, which would see greater enforcement powers and stiffer punishments meted out to those who pollute the environment.

She said the new law would focus on boosting enforcement and legislative powers, given that current laws were insufficient to tackle environmental issues.

It was reported that the proposed amendment to the act is expected to be tabled in Parliament next year.



Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari

Amirudin said several measures had been taken to improve the situation.

"We have begun pumping water from Tasik Idaman to Sungai Semenyih. Hopefully, this will help with the dilution and subsequently reduce the odour pollution.

"We are pumping 12 million litres and another machine is on the way so that we can pump another 12 million litres," he said, adding that the process would take about 24 hours.

Taps may continue to run dry on Christmas day as Pengurusan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd yesterday said supply in affected areas in the Klang Valley would return in stages starting midnight and will be fully restored in three days.

Given that the disruptions were on a large scale, Air Selangor said the recovery period for customers would vary from one area to another depending on the geographical location and altitude of the customers' premises.

"The process of increasing the balance pool level and channelling it to the distribution system as well as the service pools at the affected areas are underway before water supply can be provided for the staged recovery process.

"Consumers in the vicinity of the distribution system will receive water supply beginning midnight tonight (yesterday).

"Air Selangor expects water supply to be fully restored in Petaling, Hulu Langat, Kuala Langat and Sepang and parts of Putrajaya within 72 hours," it said in a statement.

It said water tank trucks would continue to be mobilised to affected areas.

Affected residents are advised to get the information on the water disruption via Air Selangor's mobile phone application, website (www.airselangor.com.my), Facebook page (Air Selangor), or Twitter account (@airselangor).

Users facing an emergency can send a text message to 15300, or a WhatsApp message to 019-281 6793 or 019-280 0919.