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The World's Top Dump Site for Plastic Waste



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For more than 25 years, China took in 45% of the world's total waste. Things took a turn last year when the country decided to stop importing major plastic waste due to local environmental concerns and overnight turned Malaysia into the world's largest importer of plastic waste. According to Greenpeace, much of the imported waste is being dumped in landfills or burned in open air as Malaysia does not have an adequate system to deal with the surge in plastic waste imports.

The top exporter of plastics to Malaysia from January to July 2018 is the United States of America (US) with 31.2%, followed by Japan (16.75%), United Kingdom (15.21%) and Germany (11.58%). In weights, the US exports 195,444.46 tonnes amounting to RM 128 million (Euro 27.8 million) while Japan exports 104,920.37 tonnes amounting to RM 79.4 million (Euro 17.2 million), United Kingdom exports 95,248.53 amounting to RM 76.4 (Euro 16.6 million). The US, Canada and Bermuda produce 2.21kg of solid waste per capita per day, the world's highest in 2016.

Close to 50% of the US plastic waste exports landed in Malaysia in the first six months of 2018. The US export to China dropped 92% while those to Hong Kong fell 77%, leading to Malaysia becoming the world's largest importer of plastic waste. The 157,299 tonnes of plastic waste imported from the US is a whopping 273% more than the 42,170 tonnes in 1H2017. These stats are higher than those of the rest of the world, in which US plastic waste export to the rest of the world amounts to 120,233 tonnes. To see the enormous amount of this plastic waste, 157,299 tonnes is equivalent to 1/3 of the empty weight of Dubai's Burj Khalifa.

It is worth noting that the government has closed down 139 illegal plastic waste recycling plants across the country from January to date which violated the Environmental Quality Act 1974.

Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change (<https://www.mestec.gov.my>) Minister Yeo Bee Yin said from the total, 48 investigation papers have been opened with four factories punished while 44 more were charged with summonses exceeding RM3 million (Euro 649,601).

“All 139 factories closed or had their operation ceased were the results of inspections on 239 plastic recycling factories via integrated operations held since the beginning of this year to date. Four factories have been charged RM389,000 (Euro 84,235) in summonses and one day jail while 44 other factories would be charged.



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“The total number of factories had surpassed the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) targeted by the ministry for the first quarter of this year in which is to close 100 errant factories,” she said.

She was speaking to reporters after participating in a special integrated operation on three plastic waste recycling factories around Senawang. Commenting further, Yeo said the operation would continue to be stepped to ensure those found guilty would not only be punished according to the law but also bear the cost of disposing the plastic waste seized.

“The plastic waste seized would be disposed of by auction to those who can dispose the material such as cement factories, and so on without causing further pollution. “But whatever cost the government paid for the disposal will be charged to the errant factory operators,” she said. She added that when the freeze on plastic waste import licence (AP) was imposed in July last year, the country was having 750,000 tonnes of plastic waste and the ministry was expecting the waste to be fully disposed by the middle of this year.

In this regard, the government will continue to conduct enforcement and in fact a task force has been set up to combat the issue at headquarters as well as at state level chaired by the State Environment Committee chairman who is also the chairman of the task force, she said.

“I am calling on all elected representatives and people to be alert against plastic waste recycling factories operating illegally or any activities causing air pollution and to inform authorities.

“We have 400 legal plastic waste recycling factories in the country but it does not mean they are adhering to the law so monitoring has to be conducted at least twice a year to ensure their continuous compliance.

In the operation today, two factories were found operating illegally while another was found infringing the Environmental Quality Act 1974.