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Deposit refund system a potential solution

GLOBAL Environment Centre Water and Waste Management specialist Dr K. Kalithasan said the dumping of plastic bottles was obvious in some rivers.

“Plastic bottles are bulky and they can be seen floating in most of our urban rivers.

“When the public see clean rivers they want to protect them but if it is dirty they are not bothered,” he said, citing the need for rivers and the ocean to be free of all types of trash.

Dr Kalithasan said there should be a plan by the manufacturers from the start to the end-life-cycle of a product.

“In Japan, the manufacturers have a plan for their products even when it turns into trash.

“In Malaysia, there is less regulation on the end life of the product,” he said.

Dr Kalithasan said replacing plastic bottles with glass would be challenging.

“The issue of recycling glass is still not addressed in the country.

“Not many companies want to embark on recycling glass bottles because it is less profitable,” he said.

Centre For Environment Technology and Development Malaysia executive director Anthony Tan said littering of plastic bottles was the main reason why they end up in the rivers.

“The scavengers remove the plastic bottles from the trash and they get recycled.

“However, the bottles that are indiscriminately thrown and poorly discarded end up in the rivers.

“Sometimes flood and heavy rain could sweep the bottles away into the rivers,” he said.



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Environment professor emeritus Barry Rock said considerable research on the "Pacific Gyre" or better known as the Pacific Garbage Patch has resulted in significant concern in the US.

The garbage patches consists of staggering amount of waste swirling in the ocean.

However, there has been an extensive effort to separate and recycle plastic bottles in US.

He said ground up plastic made from recycled bottles has largely replaced down feathers as insulation material.

"Reusing recycled plastic bottles is a big industry in the US.

"There are industries which collect and process plastic bottles into 'fleece' which is a type of material used to make winter wear such as vests and jackets as well as isolation in ski parkas.

"The processed plastic material is also used for insulation in building and home construction," he said.

Environment and waste management expert Dr Theng Lee Chong said most plastic bottles were recyclable and it could be prevented from entering the landfill by waste separation at the source.

The "deposit refund system" would encourage bottle segregation, said Dr Theng.

"Consumers could get a refund when they return their used plastic bottles.

"They could return it at a mall to claim their refund or even receive discounts for their next purchase," he said, adding that though plastic bottles have a recyclable value here, it offers low and almost insignificant profits.

"I feel that items such as plastic bottles, plastic sheets, metal are not recycled, they end up at the landfill.

"All these items pose environmental problems if not discarded properly.

"They are mostly nondegradable items and could take hundreds of years to degrade," said Dr Theng.

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