



STRATCOMM Bulletin

The Malaysian Reserve | MONDAY OCTOBER 18, 2021

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Recycling is key to waste recovery's future

AFES aims to secure land for its recycling centre expansion in KL and use the latest technology to automate recycling to enhance productivity

by HARIZAH KAMEL

MALAYSIA has a goal of reducing recyclable waste sent to landfills by more than 40% by 2025.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM), in line with the National Solid Waste Management Policy 2016 that targeted a national recycling rate of 22% in 2020, Malaysia's recycling rate in 2019 exceeded the set target of 28.1%, an increase of 3.5 percentage points compared to 24.6% in 2018.

In contrast with other Asian countries, South Korea and Singapore recorded recycling rates of 53.7% and 34% respectively.

Nevertheless, the topic of waste recovery in Malaysia has always been swept aside in terms of its urgency as the matter has yet to be grasped by the general public — and this needs to end.

In an interview with *The Malaysian Reserve* (TMR), Alam Flora Environmental Solutions Sdn Bhd (AFES) Infrastructure Cleansing and Waste Solutions head Khairil Walid Othman turned the spotlight onto the company's waste solutions services through the 3Rs (reduce, reuse and recycle) recycling component.

He said although the company's recycling efforts have saved waste from going directly to landfills, this can be greatly improved. The success of the initiative would depend on the collective efforts from the government, local housing and development authorities, communities, residents and schools.

"Waste separation at source (SAS), be that from homes, offices, restaurants or even large-scale festivals, is a key component in the concerted effort to divert waste from landfills and to maximise the recovery of recyclables.

"Our goal is to achieve more than 40% recovery rate by 2025. This is in support of Malaysia's ambition to achieve carbon-neutral status by 2050," he said.

Holistic Facilities

The facilities set by AFES in providing holistic environmental solutions are in a league of their own, demonstrating its commitment and effort for the environment.

In the Klang Valley alone, AFES has set up the largest Integrated Recycling Facility (IRF) in Precinct 5, Putrajaya, where all recyclables are sent for processing. These recyclables are collected from residential areas, schools, offices and eateries.

"Once brought to our IRF, we will sort them according to their waste categories; be it plastics, papers or

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“The company will invest in more sustainable facilities and better technologies that can treat waste, diverting it from going to landfills.”
— Khairil

cardboards, E-waste, recyclable cooking oil or general waste.

"These wastes will then be sorted before being pressed and baled or stored in respective storage. After which, we will sell it to our partners for reuse purposes," Khairil told TMR.

He said the very same place also houses an education centre for the public known as the Fasiliti Inovasi Kitar Semula, where his team engages the external public on creating and highlighting 3R awareness information.

"AFES also manages the Buy-Back Centres (BBC) in Klang Valley which are located in Precinct 9, Putrajaya, Cyberjaya, Kuala Lumpur and two in Pahang,

located adjacent to Stadium Darul Makmur, Kuantan, and Taman Gelora.

"The BBC serves as one of our touchpoints with the general public and residents so that anyone can exchange their recyclables for cash.

"The process is rather straightforward; the public brings their recyclables to the BBC where our staff weighs the goods and payment will be made according to the weight and rate per kg of the item," he said.

On the total tonnage of waste that have been diverted so far, Khairil said 2,838 tonnes of recyclables were recycled in 2018 and 3,744 tonnes in 2019, which showed an increasing percentage of up to 31%. Last year, the total tonnage of recy-

clables was 3,952 tonnes, an uptick of 5.5% from 2019.

Part of the process in household recycling is that the recyclable materials are deposited into respective colour-coded bins, which AFES referred to as SAS.

"These recyclables are then brought to our IRF for sorting. We currently have a semi-automatic sorting equipment where a forklift will transfer the recyclables onto a conveyor belt and our staff will manually sort according to the recyclable category," he explained. With waste increasing year by year, Khairil said AFES aims to secure land for its recycling centre expansion in Kuala Lumpur (KL) and use the latest technology to automate recycling to enhance productivity in the foreseeable future.

Going Circular

Khairil highlighted that AFES is shifting away from a linear business model of collection and disposal to embracing a more circular model by evoking people to rethink the very concept of waste.

In the past, waste was just unusable and defective materials that were always exclusively discarded. The circular economy instead states that waste can be treated and reused, effectively reducing its disposal to landfills and ushering in the sustainability agenda.

"The objective is clear; we need to do something about the environment. Sustainability for AFES is a serious business because we have seen what the destruction of the environment can do to us. This strengthens our decisions to protect the environment and we have to make a giant leap for it.

"Our future plan is setting up a recycling facility that serves as a one-stop sustainability centre that not

only collects and disposes the waste, but also to treat it," he explained.

"We are also working on an Authorised Automobile Treatment Facility where all these End-of-Life vehicles, that are hazardous to the environment and an eyesore for the public, will be recycled. We are one of the eight vendors that were appointed by the Department of Environment and the only Bumiputera company.

"Currently, we stand to be one of the biggest Bumiputera companies to do this programme and hopefully the reception is better. A lot of players want to jump into this business, so we have to do the best we can," TMR was told.

Furthermore, Khairil said this one-stop sustainability centre could generate data from the waste diverted, which is an excellent value-added service to all of the company's partners as the data will be used for their sustainability report to show how much of their waste had been recovered.

Providing New, Better Solutions

Moving forward, there are several plans for AFES' waste solutions services. Khairil said the company will invest in more sustainable facilities and better technologies that can treat waste, diverting it from going to landfills.

This will require extraordinary efforts in amplifying awareness through more outreach programmes to educate the public and getting buy-in from all key stakeholders; relevant ministries, key opinion leaders, partners, companies and the authorities to implement a structured and more stringent approach in reducing waste nationwide.

"We are also piloting a few research and development initiatives on conversion of plastics to fuel, food waste to energy and the use of black soldier fly in biowaste treatment," he said.

The company is also looking forward to other green initiatives for the public to further increase the recycling rate and to achieve green city status for Putrajaya by 2025.

Khairil noted that initiatives such as the Reward5@S Bins (RSB) encourage people to dispose of their recyclable items into RSB properly as they will receive Petronas Mesra points.

There is also the 3R On Wheels programme to attract the public to send in their recyclables and get rewarded with cash and Mesra points.

"You have to have passion in this business, which is what AFES is all about. Without passion, this is just a regular job. You have to put your heart and soul into it to succeed," Khairil concluded.



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