

No Plastic Bag Weekend begins March 26



Minister of Development (2nd R) witnessing the signing of a No Plastic Bag agreement between Haji Mohd Rozan Dato Paduka Haji Mohd Yunos (L) and a representative of local retailers. Picture: BT/Zamri Zainal

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ATTENTION all shoppers: Remember to bring your reusable bags as the "No Plastic Bag" drive will now be every Saturday and Sunday.

The Ministry of Development (MoD) has inked deals with 18 stores to cut down on the use of plastic bags.

The "No Plastic Bag Weekend" initiative will start on March 26, the same day the global "Earth Hour" drive will be observed.

Aiming to reach a recycling rate of 15 per cent by 2015, and 20 per cent by 2020, the ministry is turning its focus to green initiatives by reducing, reusing and recycling.

The agreement with 18 retail stores reads that plastic bags distributed upon the sale of products will be withheld on weekends from March 26.

Local stores that signed the agreement include Hua Ho, Supa Save, Giant Hypermart, Jaya Hypermart, Millimewah, First Emporium, National Inn Emporium, Pertama Department Store, Pertama Jaya, Sin Kiew Hin, Sin Kim Huat, Soon Lee Megamart, Utama Grand, Teguh Raya, Warisan Utama Jaya, Body Shop, Mothercare and Bebeland.

Delivering a speech at the launch of the initiative, Development Minister Pehin Orang Kaya Indera Pahlawan Dato Seri Setia Hj Suyoi Hj Osman said he was pleased to note the cooperation and support of the 18 stores to "jointly address the problem of plastic bags (that) we all know (bears) negative impacts on the environment".

The drive to stop the unnecessary use of plastics is very challenging, he said, "but what we do today can be the starting point for a plastic-free lifestyle".

Figures from recent studies show that plastic materials account for about 16 per cent of waste dumped in the country's landfill.

Results of a 2010/2011 study carried out by the Department of Environment, Parks and Recreation (Jastre) under MoD show that a mere 108 shoppers out of a total 18,043 use reusable bags at three major supermarket stores.

It was also calculated that, generally, a total of 3,000 to 5,500 plastic bags are used in major supermarkets on a Saturday, while 4,200 to 8,000 are used on a Sunday.

As some 13,700 plastic bags are used every weekend from major retail stores, it is expected that the green initiative signed with the department stores will cut out 274,000 plastic bags every weekend or 13,152,000 bags a year.

To manufacture 10 million plastic bags, a total of 14,600 litres of petroleum oil is used.

In relation to this, the minister added, "If we can reduce the use of plastic bags (by) 13.5 million, we will be able to reduce the carbon emissions that may cause climate change."

It is by sharing the same objective to reduce carbon emissions that Pehin Dato Hj Suyoi explained the "No Plastic Weekend" initiative will start on March 26, sharing the same day as the global "Earth Hour" energy conservation drive.

Highlighting the dark prospects borne out of the use of plastics, Pehin Dato Hj Suyoi said, in the breakdown process of plastics, toxic particles filter into the ground and even water tables. And when plastics are burned, gaseous dioxins that are carcinogenic and cancerous are let out into the air.

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Plastic bags back in supermarkets

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Reusable bags were no longer a fad yesterday, only a day after a plastic-less weekend at retail centres. Store managers said shoppers are now back to using plastic bags, but added that 'the seeds of awareness have been sown'. Picture: BT file

PLASTIC bags are back on the scene after the initial two-day "No Plastic Bag Weekend", managers of some retail stores that participated in the environmental drive observed yesterday.

Store officials interviewed by The Brunei Times said that unlike the past two days when customers were seen bringing their reusable bags with them while shopping or were so easily convinced to part with a few dollars to buy the items, yesterday saw a slow growing number of shoppers using the recyclable bags.

Managers of retail stores participating in the government-led initiative shared that as the weekend passed and plastic bags could be given out, the number of people using reusable bags plummeted, though the seeds of the awareness have been sown.

Many of the managers did not pass up the chance to lecture the customers using plastic bags on its damaging impact on the environment. "A lot of people are again using plastic today, it is back to normal," Mak Foon Seng, Manager of Warisan Utamajaya Emporium & Supermarket said in a telephone interview.

He added that he estimated a mere 10 per cent of customers using the reusable bag on the first day after the inaugural weekend.

"We still have some, but we must also talk to our customers and say (not) to forget to bring (their) recyclable bag, we always inform them. If we don't educate, they will always forget them."

The manager had further said that he felt "more than half a year" would be needed until the customers "consider the use of (reusable) bags, or don't forget to bring them".

"Only (during) Saturday and Sunday (the customers) supported (the drive), after that they are happy to (revert) to the plastic bags. Maybe plus one day (or) only when there is totally no plastic then the customers will bring the bag," Mak added.

Sharing the same sentiment, Chai Chu Wan, Branch Manager of Hua Ho Department Store, Kiulap said: "I have only seen one customer so far that is using the recyclable bag".

"They are very happy to have a plastic bag after the weekend."

He shared that he hoped the initiative would start prompting his customers to bring the reusable bags even on the weekdays, but was pessimistic. "I don't think they will react this good," he said.

Asked how long he thought the initiative would have to be implemented before the customers would act on weekdays, Chai said, "Not sure, unless they would be asked to use no plastic everyday."

The two-day initial "No Plastic Bag Weekend" was successful with shoppers seen lugging around their reusable bags.

A total of 18 shopping centres inked an agreement with the Ministry of Development to ban giving away of plastic bags to be used for groceries every weekend starting from March 26.

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