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Press Release

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**CALL FOR URGENT ACTION TO CLEAN UP POOR ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
IN PASIR GUDANG, JOHOR**

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) is most alarmed to learn of yet another incident of a school in the Pasir Gudang district in Johor where the health of students has been put in jeopardy.

We refer to media reports of 15 students from Sekolah Agama Taman Mawar in Pasir Gudang who were taken to a nearby hospital, as they were suffering from breathing difficulties and vomiting on Thursday.

According to press reports, the students displayed symptoms similar to those affected by the chemical pollution of Sungei Kim Kim in March this year.

The Health Minister, Datuk Sri Dr. Dzulkefly Ahmad is reported to have said that the symptoms could possibly be the result of contamination from organic fumes and that the situation at the school is “under control” with the authorities monitoring the situation, including in determining the cause of the pollution and the contamination levels.

An urgent explanation as to why the incident happened is indeed wanting.

It is indeed shocking that action is taken by the authorities only when an emergency situation presents itself, such as when students in schools face serious health conditions.

Clearly, we are not learning from the Sungei Kim Kim pollution.

SAM calls on the Department of Environment (DOE) and the State and local authorities in Johor to place high priority on the poor state of environmental quality in Johor and take urgent action in monitoring the water and air quality in the state.

This is especially needed in the Pasir Gudang district and other places where schools and residential areas are sited close to industrial sites.

Inspecting factories and industrial sites in the area is also most urgent, to ascertain how the industrial wastes are being disposed-off.

We should not be waiting for emergencies to happen before taking efforts to decontaminate the affected sites.

These incidents have also reveal that enforcement measures by authorities are rather weak, as action is only taken when complaints are received. The approach taken is usually one of ‘self-regulation,’ meaning that factories and businesses are left to self-regulate themselves.

The ‘self-regulation approach’ should be stopped immediately, and authorities, especially the DOE, and the lo-

cal and municipal councils, should step up their monitoring and inspections especially in industrial sites close to schools and residential areas.

We call for urgent action to be taken, before more students in the Pasir Gudang area succumb to further deterioration of their health due to exposure to toxic fumes and wastes from industrial activities.

Further, the culprits who cause such pollution and ill-health should be taken to task for their violation of the laws, with prosecutions that result in jail terms and huge fines, so that environmental crimes are taken seriously in the future.

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