



Sahabat Alam Malaysia **Friends of the Earth Malaysia**

For Environmental Justice

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Media Statement

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The toxic, fiery Pulau Burung landfill: SAM calls for action

Sahabat Alam Malaysia is extremely concerned that the fire in the Pulau Burung landfill is still burning underground although the fire on the surface was reportedly extinguished and under control. The toxic fumes engulfing the surrounding area has prompted evacuation of about 400 residents nearby.

SAM had earlier issued a statement on 14 January requesting the State and relevant authorities to hold an inquiry and publicise the cause of the landfill fire. We have learned that the landfill had caught fire a number of times last year and in previous years there were complaints of leachate overflowing from the landfill, which had subsequently polluted the waters here and also caused damage to the mangrove forests nearby.

The Pulau Burung Sanitary Landfill was intended to be upgraded but we have not seen an improvement of the landfill operations. In fact it was reported by the media in December 2021 that the Seberang Perai City Council had sent a notice to the landfill concession company to start upgrading works at the landfill and the company was ticked off for its poor maintenance. From the spate of problems encountered, the relevant authorities must conduct a thorough investigation.

Penang is touted to be the top state with the highest recycling rates in the country but the many cases of open dumping, mismanaged waste and the performance of the Pulau Burung landfill reflects badly on the State's management of waste.

We are now concerned that incinerator peddlers will start cajoling the State government with their technologies again. From pyrolysis to waste-to-energy plants, these technologies have been paraded as the solution to final disposal of waste. Some are pushing for zero landfill by offering incineration. But in actual fact, incineration also needs landfill space to dispose bottom ash. Fly ash which is more toxic is characterized as hazardous waste and should undergo a stabilization process before storing in hazardous waste sites.

SAM cautions the Penang State government not to be taken in with the industry hype and propositions for incineration, gasification, pyrolysis and other incinerators in disguise, because scientific data has proven that the supposed benefits of these technologies are outweighed by the financial, health and environmental risks.

Penang should be a front-runner in moving towards zero waste with community-based approaches of waste prevention, plastic reduction, reusing, repairing, and composting of organic waste. Mandatory waste separation in the state must be strictly enforced with enabling infrastructure, good collection system, and safe recycling.

We urge the Penang state government and both city councils of Penang Island and Seberang Perai to review the performance of the landfill operator, and take appropriate action to prevent any more incidents that risks the communities here or pollutes the environment.

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Sahabat Alam Malaysia