



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia  
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109  
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Websites:  
[www.consumer.org.my](http://www.consumer.org.my)

Letter to the Editor

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## Ban Waste Incineration

The Malaysian government must enact a regulation to ban all forms of waste incineration to keep out incinerators, their promoters and peddlers from Malaysia. Instead, we need policies and actions towards Zero Waste and waste reduction programmes.

Currently among the most aggressively promoted incinerators are “waste-to-energy” facilities. Last week it was announced that two waste-to-energy plants will be built in Selangor, specifically at the Jeram sanitary landfill and Tanjung Dua Belas in Kuala Langat. Communities in Bukit Payong in Johor who have been fighting a proposed landfill project there are also wary that a waste-to-energy plant will be built as an alternative.

The term “waste-to-energy” is a misnomer because waste is a highly inefficient fuel, and these facilities are barely able to generate even a small amount of electricity. As waste in Malaysia is mostly organic, the “waste-to-energy” plant would need additional energy input to first process the waste to make it suitable for burning, and then burn it.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “waste to energy” incinerators and landfills contribute far higher levels of greenhouse gas emissions and overall energy throughout their life cycles than source reduction, reuse and recycling of the same materials[ U.S. EPA, “Solid Waste Management and Greenhouse Gases, A Life-Cycle Assessment of Emissions and Sinks 3rd edition,” 2006.].

In the past there have been several protests by communities battling waste incinerator plants in their backyard. Communities objecting mega incinerators in Bohol, Puchong and Broga, Semenyih were successful in getting these plans scrapped. Some leaders in the current government played a big role in those protests and thus it is disconcerting that the same people are not objecting to the incinerator projects being proposed now.

It is high time for a total ban on waste incinerators in Malaysia because incinerators waste valuable resource materials and do not magically make solid waste disappear. Rather incinerators are the most costly of all discard management options, result in air and water pollution, waste raw materials, and still need to be supplemented by landfills for disposal of ash and hence threatening groundwater.

Incinerators also increase risk of environmental and health threats. Incinerators are major sources of pollutants such as dioxin, lead, and other heavy metals and toxic emissions released into the environment. Many of these pollutants enter the food supply and concentrate up through the food chain. Incinerators also release carbon monoxide, oxides of sulphur and nitrogen, hydrocarbons and particulates into the air.

We are also concerned that the proposed “waste-to-energy” plants will be used to burn the residual waste from the plastic waste recycling industry. When burned, plastic releases persistent organic pollutants and a multitude of toxic emissions, causing public health hazards.

Hence there is a need to redirect the millions of dollars in investments for incineration systems into waste prevention, reduction and zero waste systems that maximize both return on investments and economic development opportunities.

Composting is key to achieving 50% or higher diversion levels and can be done cost-effectively. We need to emphasize backyard or at-home composting followed by community composting. Keeping organics and biodegradables out of waste collected by municipalities will reduce the volume of waste to be disposed.

The transition towards waste-free society has begun in many cities, including in Malaysia. Moving towards zero waste requires action and cooperation by individuals, communities, businesses, producers, recycling industry and government at all levels. For a start, the government of Malaysia has drawn up a road map towards zero single-use plastics.

Now there is an urgent need for a regulation to be enacted to ban waste incineration. The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) urges the Malaysian government to embrace zero waste as a vision for the future, formulate and enforce legislations that institutionalize zero waste initiatives.

**S.M. MOHAMED IDRIS**

**President**

**Consumers Association of Penang**