



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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Letter to the Editor

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## PBAPP needs to get its act together

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) urges the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) to get its act together because Penangites are bracing themselves for unexpected water cuts because of burst pipelines. It is not only meant for a series of Sungai Perai incidents but also burst pipes in residential areas.

We urge PBAPP to be actively involved in preventive maintenance rather than responding to burst pipes in a piecemeal fashion. Many of the pipes and valves are more than 50 years old and it is necessary to change them – but systematically – because water is a precious commodity and should not be allowed to leak. Besides a wastage of potable water, it can also result in soil erosion leading to the appearance of sinkholes.

The average lifespan of mains and distribution pipes is estimated to be 40 years and the valves are also about the same lifespan. Therefore, if the mains and distribution pipes had to be changed, the valves should also be changed at the same time for logistic reasons as PBAPP had recently done.

It is pointless at this juncture to point fingers at whoever is responsible for deciding to place the 1,350mm pipeline in Sungai Perai but evidently, it is a bad idea and it should be avoided in the future. Anyway, PBAPP had announced that a new pipe will be built above the river surface.

Having a pipeline underwater has many disadvantages (unless there are better reasons unknown to us):

- It is difficult to monitor the condition of the pipeline.
- If the pipe bursts (such as in recent incidents), repairs are extremely difficult to carry out, requiring special equipment and a different skill set to handle the job.
- Encasing it in concrete does not protect it from water corrosion if the concrete fails.

We wish to reiterate that PBAPP, besides changing the main pipeline, has to consider the ageing distribution pipelines as well. There are occasions when residents of housing estates complained of low water pressure to their houses because of burst pipes in their area. The existing age and condition of the valves and pipelines have much to tell about the dire need for PBAPP to actively engage in preventive maintenance.

The existing pipelines should be mapped and checked periodically to ensure that there are no water leakages. The leaking pipes should be replaced according to a plan.

Penang water tariff is the lowest in the whole country but consumers should not waste water just because it is affordable.

In 2021, each person in Penang used an atrocious 305 litres of domestic water per day and it was the first time it breached the 300 litres per capita per day (LCD) mark since 1999. This is almost double the 158 litres of domestic water that each person in Singapore used per day in the same year.

We would propose to PBAPP to introduce rainwater harvesting systems to buildings. The availability of such systems will help reduce a household's water consumption for general purposes as well as to reduce water bills.

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