

Bogor village ridden with toxic lead gets modern cleanup

Residents of Cinangka village in Bogor, West Java, a center for used battery smelting, are sleeping sounder after Indonesian and American organizations carried out the country's first encapsulation cleanup of lead-slag waste in their area. Chairman of the Committee for Leaded Gasoline Eradication (KPBB) Ahmad "Puput" Safrudin said on Monday that his organization cooperated with the New York-based Blacksmith Institute to conduct the encapsulation lead cleanup from October 2013 to March 2014. He explained that encapsulation was a method of US origin to clean land contaminated by lead slag by securing it in a trapezoidal capsule, which is then buried deep in uncontaminated soil.

"We have buried the capsule, made of clay, in unpolluted soil at the depth of 6 meters," he said, adding that the capsule was 41.4 meters long and 4 meters high. He said that the cleanup and capsule production cost around Rp 3 billion (US\$253,431), which was fully financed by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP). He said that 50 local workers, supervised by 14 foreign experts, sorted 2,850 cubic meters of polluted soil from a 4-hectare area, on which around 30 entrepreneurs had been disposing battery waste since 1978. Puput said that Cinangka was not the only lead slag-polluted village, as there were 70 similar spots across the Greater Jakarta Area. "There are around 140 lead-slag-polluted areas in the country," he said.

He explained that his committee and Blacksmith chose Cinangka as their first encapsulation project site because the village was the worst contaminated of all the Greater Jakarta lead pollution sites, with a pollutant concentration of 100,000 parts per million (ppm) in the soil and with human contamination of more than 60 milligrams of glucose per deciliter (Mg/dL) in the blood of its children. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), he said, the maximum harmless lead concentration in the soil was 400 ppm and in humans 10 Mg/dL. He revealed that after his committee and Blacksmith conducted the cleanup from October 2013 to March 2014, the pollutant concentration in the soil had decreased to 346 ppm.

According to Puput, many Cilangka residents have long been suffering from various ailments, such as headaches, hypertension, asphyxiation, anemia, impotence and stomach cramps. "The lead-slag pollution has also made Cinangka's children suffer from serious health conditions, ranging from low Intelligence Quotient [IQ] levels and physical disabilities to autism," he said. The head of the Environment Ministry's foreign cooperation and planning bureau, Rasio Ridho Sani, said the government fully supported the encapsulation cleanup conducted by KPBB and Blacksmith at Cinangka village, which would be followed with cleanups in other contaminated parts of the country. "This is a historical day because the encapsulation was the first to be conducted in the country. This breakthrough will not be made only in Cinangka," he said. "A village in Tarakan, North Kalimantan, will be the site of our next project."

He also said that the number of areas in the country contaminated by lead slag continued to increase, as used battery smelting companies were still disposing waste carelessly, despite government entreaties. "If they continue to fail to clean up their waste, we will sue them," Puput said. (alz) A's steering body and leader of the Banger River community, says. He claims that the protection offered by the program is obvious. "Ninety percent of residents are ready to pay the water fee," Sumono says. "They understand that raising their own houses would be far more expensive."

At home: Mukhoiriah, 36, with her mother and her children stands in front of their house. Over the years, her family has filled the flooded floor with sands and rocks thus burying their own house.