

# Recycle, recycle — there's no time to waste Jakarta

Jakarta, we have a problem! No it's not "Houston" this time! Actually we all know it but we don't want to face it. It's that dirty word, "waste".

Our city administration has been battling for many years to dispose of the large volume of waste generated in Jakarta. The city has been manfully transporting this material through busy traffic and over significant distances across town to landfill sites on the southeastern fringe of Jakarta and into Bekasi.

The city's people (and the daily visitors who work and visit there), are the very same ones who complain about unsightly waste piled along the roadside and blocking drains, but notably, don't have any time to recycle. Furthermore, some of us don't want transfer or recycling depots built in the vicinity of our homes or offices. It's the so-called "nimby" syndrome; Not in my backyard! Or another bad one: Not my problem! All of this adds up to a big waste problem.

The good news is some of the solutions are in the back seats of our cars and in our kitchens. The answers are also in our very own hands.

Households, where children (from side in the kitchen or from the back car seat) watch every move their parents make, generally don't sort waste into organic (food and paper) and non-organic (plastic, glass and metals). If asked why, people usually say "I don't have time".

What, no time to educate our children, care about God's earth, consider the good of the community or think about the future production of our favorite food?

Yes, every time we carelessly "co-dispose" (or mix) our wastes, we prevent reuse and recycling and even prevent healthy food production using fertilizer made from recycled organic material (waste-derived compost). Many cities worldwide very effectively perform recycling from urban organic wastes.

Now, maybe its Jakarta's turn.

Recycled putrescible organics can be cheaply turned into compost which is nature's best natural fertilizer. There's an excellent compost-making facility at Bantar Gebang, Jakarta's main landfill site and there are many others operating quietly and unappreciated in transfer depots across the city. So, I hear you say, what's our role in solving the waste problem?

Make sure you recycle your organics carefully, not mixing them with non-putrescibles (that means things that don't rot) or in common terms "non-organics". And this goes hand in hand with taking more care in separating for recycling the other things we throw away too. Put them in separate bags or separate containers for collection.

Recycling plastic should be every mature citizen's aim. Plastic is after all just a solidified form of crude oil, which we need to import these days (what happened to the time when Indonesia had plenty of it?). So when we waste our plastics (burn them or bury them forever in landfills) we are wasting an imported non-renewable resource.

Then think of the kids. Or even better involve them. And simply think of the future. We humans have already exceeded our global footprint on this planet, so we must think of each other and increase the number of habits that are truly sustainable at the household, office and factory level.

If this is not possible in the educated neighborhoods of big cities like Jakarta and Bandung, then where can we address such problems?

And why not give way in traffic to a garbage truck, smile at a pemulung (waste picker) and maybe even (hey, this is radical) rinse clean and sort out your bottles, plastic bags and cans and keep them for your favorite waste worker. It would do more for them (and others) than a gift of Rp10,000 (85 US Cents) at Idul Fitri.

Now, let me talk about food production and security. Did you know that only a handful of compost on each cucumber plant can help boost its harvested crop by 100 percent? Rice yields can increase by at least 30 percent (for only an additional 5 percent increase in cost) using organic compost alongside the usual chemical fertilizers and good results have also been found with most vegetables and fruit trees. This is game-changing stuff, right?

Actually the Agriculture Ministry has been saying “use compost” since the 1990s, so why are we wasting time? By separating our organics properly at home or work we can help boost compost production and lower its cost to farmers.

What else can we do?

Discuss, join in and champion recycling and compost at a local level. Bury your kitchen’s food scraps or make your own compost. There are 100s of designs for home-based compost bins on the web, and they are really quite good fun to build and use with the children.

And get ready for better city-led waste management that has more “organics” bins in place. And please, please don’t put bottles or plastic bags in them.

Hey are we really that ignorant? Irresponsible? Lacking in pride for our city? Lazy? Or rude?

Please take time to recycle, Jakarta. If not, we may be wasting our time complaining about waste.

And this is not just a call to our capital city, but to all cities, towns and villages in this fine and (mostly) beautiful country. Responsible waste handling is everyone’s responsibility!

“Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It is lent to you by your children” (Kenyan proverb). The children are watching!

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