

Batam faced with huge piles of garbage

Mounds of garbage have been a common sight on almost every corner of Batam city, Riau Islands, ever since the end of August, with the city's municipality not dealing with the issue.

An expired contract between the municipality and its partner in managing the waste has been blamed as the problem.

A resident at the Bukit Surya Indah housing complex in Batam, Ivan Attorik, said the Batam sanitary and park agency, or its partner, usually collected his household waste twice a week.

However, the garbage collection timetable had not been clear since the end of August and at times garbage had not been collected for up to a month. Consequently, garbage has accumulated in residential areas.

"During the night, not only mosquitoes swarm around our homes, but also flies from the piles of garbage. We have to carry the garbage to the dumpster, which is quite far from home, to prevent the stench from disturbing us," said Ivan.

Despite this, the sanitary office continued to collect monthly waste collection fees of Rp 10,000 (about US\$1.10), added Ivan. The neighborhood unit chief said that he also could not tackle the issue.

At the Sei Panas housing complex, neighborhood unit chiefs closed the temporary dumpster, which meant that waste piled up to four meters high due to people viewing it as the main garbage dump. A number of residents have taken steps to tackle the problem.

The waste crisis is attributed to the contract between the Batam sanitary office and its partner PT Royal Gensah Asih (RGA), which expired on Aug. 31.

The municipality failed to offer a new tender for waste collection before the contract ended, due to limited funds at the Batam municipality.

Batam Sanitary and Park Agency head Azwan said that despite the slack, he denied his office had neglected to collect the waste, as it had carried out garbage collection without RGA's assistance until the tender process was completed.

Batam produces 700 tons of domestic waste daily, and while 14 dump trucks are able to carry 300 tons daily, that means that 400 tons are left behind.

"I am tired of explaining the garbage crisis. We actually work day and night to deal with waste in Batam. Many people are criticizing us without knowing the real problem. We are currently carrying out the tender process, but this doesn't mean that without a partner we neglect garbage collection. We still collect waste, despite not operating at our maximum," said Azwan.

Azwan added the municipality was expected to determine a new partner to collect garbage by the end of the year, when conditions would return to normal.

Criticisms of the Batam municipality have deemed that it has failed to deal with the annual waste crisis in Batam. Helmi Hemilton, member of Batam municipal council and the House of Representatives' Commission I on defense, foreign affairs and information, said that the municipality had not dealt with the waste issue in Batam from 2009.