

CLEAN UP YOUR ACT

Several public and private initiatives are aimed at reducing plastic waste in Thailand. **B5**

Renewed focus on plastic waste

Practical solutions are required as the volume continues to mount, writes **Yuthana Praiwan**

Thailand is pushing ahead with projects to reduce plastic waste as it struggles to reduce sea pollution, especially after efforts slowed during the pandemic.

In 2018, the Prayut Chan-o-cha government initiated a policy to ban single-use plastic bags and began by asking retailers not to hand them out for free to shoppers from Jan 1, 2020.

Later that same year, Thailand was hit by the pandemic, prompting the authorities to implement work-from-home guidelines and lockdown measures. The spread of the virus was curtailed, but as people spent more time at home, they used food delivery services, driving demand for plastic bags and styrofoam containers.

Changes in daily lifestyles led to a 62% surge in plastic waste from 2.12 million tonnes

in 2019 to 3.4 million tonnes in 2020, according to the Thailand Environment Institute.

Advocates hope if public and private sector efforts to deal with plastic waste gain momentum, they could pave the way for better management through recycling or reducing the use of plastic materials.

GROWING VOLUME

Effective solutions to the waste problem are needed as the volume continues to grow, piling more pressure on Thailand as it seeks to limit the pollution.

Last year, the total amount of plastic waste was 25.7 million tonnes, a rise of almost 3% from 24.9 million tonnes in 2021. Up to 28% of the waste was not properly disposed of, according to the Pollution Control Department.

Plastic waste is the major type of garbage

that is poorly managed.

Some unwanted plastic items and materials are dumped in the sea, intensifying the problem in the country.

According to Thailand Development Research Institute, the nation dumped the 10th-largest amount of plastic waste in the sea in 2020.

Most of the marine waste is plastics, including bottles (14%), plastic debris (12%), styrofoam boxes (10%), food wrappers (8%), plastic bags (8%) and straws (5%).

PUBLIC-PRIVATE ALLIANCE

The Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW) is a collaboration between state agencies and private sector companies that implemented the Smart Recycling Hub project to build a material recovery facility that aims to recycle 50,000 tonnes of plastic waste a year.



A woman puts groceries into a cloth bag after paying at a Bangkok mall participating in a state campaign to stop providing plastic bags to customers in 2020. WICHAN CHAROENKIATPAKUL

The facility focuses on plastic waste in Bangkok and the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC).

Members of AEPW include the Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (TISTR), the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), the EEC Office, the Public Private Partnership for Sustainable Plastics and Waste Management, the Plastics

Institute of Thailand, Dow Thailand Group, SCG Chemicals Plc and Insee Ecocycle, which specialises in turning industrial waste into renewable fuel.

"As a representative of Dow and AEPW, I believe we can create a successful circular economy as well as advance our communities and the world towards greater sustainability," said Jim Fitterling, chairman and chief execu-

tive of Dow and chairman of AEPW.

Both the government and business sectors have launched projects to deal with solid waste.

TISTR governor Chutima Eamchochawalit said the institute is piloting a project to separate waste for recycling in Saraburi and collaborating with Dow to run a similar project to promote better garbage management in Rayong.

She said the two projects can serve as a model for other provinces on how to earn money from waste disposal, such as sorting garbage for recycling.

The BMA is also dealing with waste, with City Hall working with the public to curb the growing amount of garbage in the capital.

Porn Vikitsreth, an advisor to Bangkok governor Chadchart Sittipunt, said the BMA launched a campaign to encourage people to adopt a new daily routine by separating household waste and dividing it into organic and dry waste for more appropriate disposal.

"This project is not only good for the environment, but it also helps city officials reduce waste management costs," he said.

LESS USAGE

Department stores and companies that make materials to replace plastic containers can work with the government to reduce the use of plastics by consumers.

The Pollution Control Department



ABOVE
Greenpeace Thailand staff and volunteers collect beach garbage as part of a campaign to determine the brand of waste packages. The activity in Chon Buri marked World Cleanup Day on Sept 16.
GREENPEACE THAILAND



RIGHT
In this file photo, veterinarians worked on 80 pieces of black plastic rubbish found in the stomach of a male short-finned pilot whale that died in Songkhla province in 2018.



Activists join a campaign called "Everyday Say No to Plastic." SOMCHAI POOMLARD

launched a three-year campaign dubbed "Everyday Say No to Plastic Bags" on Jan 1, 2020, urging businesses, including malls and convenience stores, to use fewer plastic bags.

Some 90 companies participating in the campaign reduced usage of up to 14.3 billion single-use plastic bags, or 81,531 tonnes, according to department chief Pinsak Suraswadi.

The department is working on the second phase of the plastic waste management scheme, running from 2023 to 2027, aiming to reduce the use of plastic containers for food and promoting alternative materials that are environmentally friendly.

The authorities set an ambitious goal to recycle 100% of used plastic materials, meaning there will be no plastic garbage sent to landfills, he said.

The department also wants to reduce plastic waste that may end up being discarded or thrown in the sea by 50%, said Mr Pinsak.

In the private sector, companies are developing plans to turn concern about plastic waste into new business opportunities.

SCG Packaging Plc (SCGP) earlier announced it is working on a project to turn eucalyptus into bioplastic in cooperation with US-based Origin Materials, which specialises in making carbon-negative materials.

Carbon-negative materials are used in processes aimed at manufacturing materials

while avoiding carbon dioxide emissions.

The company has yet to decide what type of plastic containers will be developed if the biodegradable plastic project proves successful, but Wichan Jitpukdee, chief executive of SCGP, said the company is interested in making eucalyptus-derived plastic bags to contain hot food.

The company grows several thousand eucalyptus trees for its paper business.



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THAILAND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH INSTITUTE

ALL YOU CAN EAT

Biodegradable Packaging for Environment Co (BPE) focuses on eco-friendly materials.

The company produces food and beverage containers made from agricultural refuse.

When these containers are used and thrown in the garbage, they will decompose and can eventually be used as organic fertiliser for plants, according to physician-turned-businessman Weerachat Kittirattanapaboon, chief executive of BPE.

He said the company developed new products in addition to plates and bowls during the pandemic, including food boxes, tiffin boxes, cups and straws, all of which are produced from biodegradable materials.

BPE also designed special packaging materials, including a fresh durian package that can contain the strong smell during transport, and a plate that can absorb cooking oil from deep-fried food, said Mr Weerachat.