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LETTERS

ENVIRONMENT

ACT FAST TO ADDRESS 'AIR-POCALYPSE'

SEPT 26 was World Environmental Health Day, an annual event recognised by the International Federation of Environmental Health. In light of air pollution issues, the theme this year was "Indoor and Outdoor Air Quality".

This topic is timely – air pollution has been campaigned by environmental scientists, nature lovers and non-governmental organisations.

Declining air quality has become a global concern since most of the world population are living in areas with high pollution levels, according to a World Health Organisation (WHO) report last year. The report also said it was estimated that more than six million deaths had been associated with exposure to indoor and outdoor pollution.

Some of the culprits of outdoor pollution are:

INDUSTRIAL emissions;
TRAFFIC emissions; and,
BURNING of agriculture crops.

Sources of indoor air pollution include second hand tobacco smoke and household emissions from furniture or cooking, such as the use of traditional cooking stoves. The concentrations and relative contributions of the air pollutants are influenced by meteorological factors, therefore the pollution is also sensitive to climate change.

Generally, air pollution occurs when the mixture of solid and gaseous particles, including fine and coarse particulate matter, bioaerosols, nitrogen dioxide, ozone and carbon dioxide are emitted into the air. These air pollutants will undergo chemical or physical transformation, before causing adverse health effects to the exposed receptor, particularly human population.

Who is susceptible to air pollution? Children, pregnant women, elderly and people with pre-existing respiratory or cardiovascular disease have been shown to be at increased risk to

acute or deadly health impacts.

The former chief of WHO, Dr Margaret Chan, has said air pollution causes death to 600,000 children yearly and is more terrifying than Ebola or HIV. Interestingly, researchers found consistently higher fine particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide levels in children's breathing, which are from vehicle exhaust pipe fumes.

With the recurring haze problem in Malaysia, it gets harder each time to improve our air quality levels. But, we cannot continue to blame our neighbours. We need to be responsible and mature. There, however, has been progress on efforts by our government and neighbours to address the problem.

It's been reported that we produce more gas emissions when we are in cars during traffic jams.

The pollutants that are released into the air are dangerous to pedestrians. Our local researchers found commuting via mass rapid transit may cut our risk by 183 deaths from fine particulates' exposure and reduce 337,800 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually.

We should bear in mind that Malaysia has the highest rate of obesity in the Asian region and that cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Malaysia. A majority of us spend 70 to 90 per cent of our time indoors, thus we need to ensure that our indoor air quality is at its best.

With effective policies and close monitoring of toxic emissions, we should be able to tackle air pollution.

We want the people to breathe

cleaner air in Malaysia. Perhaps we should start to see the value of open real data to the public and this will make them feel more engaged and aware of how air pollution affects them. The application of Internet of things (IoT) for air pollution monitoring may enable the information to be sent or received by the user.

Malaysia has been dubbed "air-pocalypse" owing to scientific evidence of declining air quality and health effects. Therefore, we need effective measures to combat and control air pollution, especially in this era of Fourth Industrial Revolution.

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