

Enforcement, heavy penalties needed to protect post-MCO environment

KUALA LUMPUR: Other than apparently being successful in controlling the spread of COVID-19, the Movement Control Order (MCO) which was in force for 50 days, also brought good in terms of the quality of the environment specifically air and river water.

The stoppages of operations of most industrial activities during the MCO period especially during phase one to three had contributed to these conditions.

Surely, the atmosphere could continue to be enjoyed and maintained after the MCO if the laws on the environment is tightened with more stringent enforcement, according to Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Environmental Studies Faculty senior lecturer Dr Mohd Yusoff Ishak.

He said this could be done with improvements to the Environment Quality Act 1974 by inserting tighter conditions and compliance requirements.

He said the act, which was enforced in 1975, was seen as becoming less effective especially with the current situation whereby many pollutants out there which were not monitored under the act.

"This is unavoidable as more and more products including consumer goods such as new generation cosmetics are being used by society today," he told Bernama.

In addition, Mohd Yusoff said cooperation from local authorities (PBT) was also needed in the area of enforcement especially to control activities involving construction and food stalls which were seen to be the cause of river pollutions.

"Local authorities need to tighten the operating conditions of construction activities especially in controlling sediment pollution to the river, while food stall activities should also ensure that

they do not release water used for washings directly into the drains and subsequently into the river," he added.

In addition to enforcement issues, some legal cases related to serious environmental pollution that were still pending also did not cause any feeling of trepidation among environmental criminals.

"The burden of proving the case is getting more difficult when it comes to new generation pollutants.

"Therefore, environmental forensic methods are increasingly needed with the support of state-of-the-art equipment and environmental experts from universities, for example," he said.

University of Pahang's Faculty of Civil Engineering Technology (UMP) senior lecturer Dr Nurul Nadrah Aqilah Tuki-mat said in order to ensure that the air quality was in good standing post-MCO, sources contributing to such pollutions, namely, vehicle smoke emissions, industrial and construction work had to be controlled.

She said drastic measures should also be taken by the government such as limiting land exploration and logging activities to maintain clean air quality.

"Various efforts and policies have been put in place by the government in ensuring the level and impact of greenhouse gases are under control and they are more than adequate.

"However, enforcement and implementation are weak, so policy objectives cannot be supported. In this situation, everyone needs to co-operate and play their part," she said.

Nurul Nadrah Aqilah said that in line with the practice of 'a new normal', the public should also adopt the new normal in question to the care and control of the environment. - Bernama