



Stricter by-laws needed

Environmentalists and industry experts say regulations are not stringent enough to ensure oil, fat and grease are not released into the sewers. >2&3

Good effort: Klang Municipal Council staff member, R. Kalyani Devi, (right) observing a contractor as he weighs the used oil she sent in for MPK's recycling project. — AZLINA ABDULLAH/The Star



This trader in Section 7, Shah Alam, says she gives away used cooking oil for recycling instead of reusing them or dumping them into the drain.

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ENVIRONMENTAL and industry experts believe that the laws surrounding the use of grease traps at eateries in Selangor are inadequate and needs to be tightened.

Global Environment Centre (GEC) river care programme coordinator Dr K. Kalithasan said the existing law only required food operators to install a grease trap as a condition to obtain or renew their licence.

This by-law under the Food Establishment Act 2007 was introduced by local councils in Selangor, with many of them organising campaigns to collect used oil from the grease traps.

However, the by-law did not specify details on the grease trap's size, maintenance and oil collection, making it easy for the eatery operators to flout it.

"The operators install cheap grease traps just to fulfil the requirements, instead of looking at the capacity and the amount of oil, fat and grease (FOG) they produce," Dr Kalithasan noted.

He said operating hours were another important factor when specifying the capacity, as round-the-clock restaurants would require grease traps with higher capacities compared to smaller operators.

FOG released into the drains clog them and block water flow, resulting in flash floods besides attracting rodents and other disease-carrying pests.

Dr Kalithasan pointed out that training restaurant workers in how to handle and maintain grease traps was also necessary.

"Most of the restaurant operators and workers have no knowledge on grease traps or FOG maintenance," he said.

He is currently heading GEC's efforts in helping to rejuvenate Sungai Kelang and Sungai Gombak under the River of Life project.

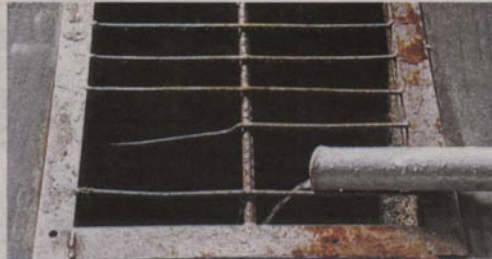
Another issue he highlighted that needed to be looked into, was what happened to the FOG that was filtered out by the grease traps, saying there was a lack of monitoring and enforcement by the authorities in this area.

"Where is the oil going?"

"If the council is collecting the oil via vendors and contractors, is tax-

Sticky situation with grease trap by-laws

Experts call for stricter rules in Selangor



Grease traps ensure water released into drains are free of fat, oil and grease.

payers' money being used or are the vendors themselves buying the oil?" he questioned.

He said these issues had to be clarified before the local authority set up the grease trap and used-oil projects.

A former Selangor local council health director, on the other hand, firmly believes that the system is to be blamed for the failure of the grease trap project.

The ex-director, who declined to be named, said the overlap of responsibilities between departments was one of the main causes of the project's poor results.

"There are too many departments handling this issue.

"Grease traps should fall under the purview of the Health Department, which already monitors food operators," he reasoned.

The current system also resulted in poor management of complaints as well as monitoring duties.

"Every one tends to point fingers at other departments for issues to be resolved while departments such as Planning, Enforcement, Engineering and Building do not

have the expertise to handle the problem.

"Issuing summonses to restaurants and food stalls that do not comply with the ruling is just one action.

"There has to be follow-ups, which these departments do not have the time to do.

"It is best to send out Health officers who are already conducting checks on a daily basis," he elaborated.

However, when asked if there were enough employees in the said department to conduct these checks, the expert said an enforcement team must be set up specifically for the Health Department.

At present, he said, local councils have a larger number of personnel in their enforcement team compared to health officers.

He said a team should be placed in the Health Department to be trained.

"Health departments can train the enforcement officers on things to look out for, including the requirements of the by-laws, so they can go around conducting



Dr Kalithasan says there is room for improvement where guidelines are concerned.

checks," he added.

As a word of advice to local council heads, the former director said the opinions of senior officers and experienced staff should be taken into account.

Meanwhile, council staff admitted that there were challenges faced in the project's execution.

Klang Municipal Council (MPK) Urban Planning officer Ruzaana Abdul Rahman said the council initiated the grease trap and used cooking oil project in 2010 after discovering that oil and food particles were polluting Sungai Kelang, resulting in floods in several neighbourhoods there.

Despite the increasing amount of used oil collected from year to year, she said the council acknowledged that there was still room for improvement.

StarMetro recently reported that only 80 out of 1,500 food operators



The grease traps placed under the sinks ensure food waste, grease and oil do not flow into the river.



in Klang had functioning grease traps.

"Food operators are reluctant to give up their used cooking oil.

"They reuse the oil to such extremes that the oil we collect can no longer be turned into biodiesel," she said.

There were also operators who refused to repair their malfunctioning grease traps as they considered it a waste of money.

Ruzaana said only four restaurants within MPK's jurisdiction were cooperating with the council

in this matter.

However, the council hoped to rectify the problem by reviewing its by-laws.

"We are mulling the idea of immediately revoking the licence of those found flouting the law," Ruzaana said, adding that the existing law stated that the fine for this offence was RM1,000.

In Shah Alam, the maximum fine for failing to install a grease trap or for a malfunctioning contraption is RM500.

Shah Alam City Council (MBSA)

began imposing installation of grease traps as part of the business licence requirements in 1993.

MBSA Waste Management and Public Cleansing Department director Mohd Azmi Amer Khan said despite its best efforts, the council was still unable to garner optimum cooperation from certain quarters.

"There are those who continue to dump oil into the drains.

"This is why we still get complaints from residents. We really hope this mindset will change for the benefit of all," he added.