

Singapore

**More years for landfill with more recycling**

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Semakau dumping ground can last another 5 years if 70% target met

THE initial 40-year lifespan of Semakau Landfill, the sole dumping ground for Singapore's waste, will be extended by five years if new recycling targets are met.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) revealed this in response to queries, following calls by Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Yaacob Ibrahim for efforts to be stepped up so that 70 per cent of all rubbish generated here will be recycled by 2030.

The overall recycling rate of 40 per cent, which has been stagnant since the mid-90s, increased to 56 per cent last year. The new 70 per cent target was a benchmark set as part of a sustainability report announced earlier this year, which aims to make Singapore greener and more energy-efficient over the next 20 years.

The \$610 million Semakau Landfill, situated among the southern islands of Pulau Semakau and Pulau Sakeng, is built over an area of 350ha, with a capacity of 63 million cubic metres. Opened in 1999, it had been estimated to last till 2040. To date, 12 per cent has already been filled.

Speaking at a ceremony earlier this month to mark the official closure of the Ulu Pandan Incineration Plant, Dr Yaacob said the 70 per cent recycling target was needed to stem the amount of rubbish being disposed here. 'It has to come because if we continue at this rate...we are going to have a big problem.'

Refuse disposal has increased six-fold since the 1970s due to factors such as population and economic expansion. At this rate, Singapore will need a new 350-ha landfill every 25 to 30 years, an NEA study noted.

'But there is simply no more suitable land left,' said Mr Low Fong Hon, director of the NEA's waste management department. With a population density of 6,520 per square metre, Singapore is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

To alleviate the issue, measures such as ramping up recycling and waste-to-energy incineration, which is the burning of waste into ash, have kept the amount of rubbish dumped at Semakau within 'manageable levels', said Dr Yaacob.

In 2007, just 7 per cent - comprising non-incinerable waste and ash - of the 2.57 million tonnes of waste generated ended up at Semakau.

And the 'throw-away' mentality shows little sign of abating, said Mr Low.

Last year, more than 7,200 tonnes of rubbish were tossed here every day - enough to fill almost 2-1/2 football fields to a height of 1.7m. This roughly equates to each individual throwing almost 1kg of rubbish a day - a 25 per cent increase since 1971.

Dr Yaacob said that to meet the new recycling target, a solution has to be found to improve the present low recycling rates for **food waste** and plastics. Last year, they accounted for more than 40 per cent of the 2.63 million tonnes of rubbish disposed.

The authorities are studying proposals to adopt new technology that allows for the sorting of different types of waste at source, from both households and industry, to boost these targets.

This will at least delay the inevitable conundrum of where to find a site to store the Republic's rubbish.