

BUY WISELY; HELP IN CONSERVATION

For 50 years we have celebrated world environment day with the usual speeches, human chains and press reports on protecting the environment. But there has been little impact on citizens. And pollution, whether that of noise, air or water, continues to slip from bad to worse.

We are treating the symptom and not the disease. Instead of targeting individuals, we are concentrating on enacting laws and punishing industries. Though these measures are essential at the macro-level, the movement should start at the micro-level, with you. Don't be under the impression that the government and legislations alone can protect the environment. As consumers, we can all do a lot in this direction.

Make a start towards protecting the environment by avoiding packaging of the products you buy. It is estimated that packaging accounts for almost two-thirds of what we throw away every day. The environment gets polluted both at the manufacturing and packaging stages. Earlier, packaging was to protect and contain a product, prevent tampering, provide information and preserve the product. But in recent times manufactures seem to be more bothered about another 'P' product promotion.

The consumer's Handbook for Reducing Solid Waste, published by the US Environmental Protection Agency, lists out steps to reduce packaging and thereby pollution. While choosing between two similar products, select the one with lesser redundant packaging. Secondly, purchase vegetables and fruits without packing. Further, consider large or economy sizes for household items like soaps and shampoos. You can also write to the manufacturer to change over to environment-friendly packaging. Let them know that you have decided not to buy their product due to unnecessary packaging.

Recycling means reusing materials instead of throwing them away after single use. For example, bottles, cans and jars can be recycled. Statistics collected by the Consumers Association of Penang, Malaysai, state that recycling single aluminium can save enough energy to produce 20 more cans. Recycling a glass bottle/ jar saves 25 per cent of the energy consumed in producing one. It also reduces the pollution in manufacturing a new bottle.

You can also help protect the environment by purchasing products that can be reused. For example, instead of buying simple battery cells, rechargeable batteries would be a better choice. Just two bits of statistics from Utusan Konsumer are revealing. One says that approximately eight per cant of the world's population own cars. They are responsible for 13 per cant of the world's carbon dioxide emission. Also, about one-fourth of the world's population eats meat. But this segment consumes almost half of the world's grains used to fatten livestock.

Refusing to buy products which harm the environment is one way of protecting the environment and yourself. Now that eco-friendly products are flooding the market, promote them. Refuse products packaged in materials that cannot be recycled. Some manufactures can give more information in this regard. Refuse products manufactured by companies with poor environmental records. Do not purchase products which make misleading claims.

ARE YOU ECO-FRIENDLY?

To find out if you're a 'green' consumer, check this out. Do you avoid products that:

1. Endanger the health of the consumer or of others?
2. Cause significant damage to the environment during manufacture, use or disposal?
3. Cause unnecessary waste, either because of over packaging or because of unduly short useful life?
4. Use materials from threatened species/environments?
5. Involve cruelty to animals, whether this be for toxicity testing or for any other purpose?
6. Adversely affect other countries, particularly in the third world?

(Source: The Green Consumer Guide)

