

HAZARD

BURNING PITS FOIL BID TO CLOSE FACTORY

DOE to wait few days to seal premises to ensure fire does not spread

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OFFICERS from the Department of Environment yesterday went to the illegal carbon filter-processing factory in Sungai Lembu here to shut its operation, but burning sawdust pits kept that at bay.

A six-man team from Kepala Batas arrived at 12.15pm and proceeded to inspect the factory's premises. They also spoke with workers.

The officers then sought help from the Fire and Rescue Department to extinguish the burning pits. However, the firemen failed to put out the fire completely as embers were still smouldering.

"We need between four and seven days before the fire in the pits can be completely extinguished. We will seal the factory after that. If we seal it now without putting out the fire completely, it may spread to other areas.

"So, we have to wait," the department said in a press statement yesterday.

State DOE director Rusnani Abdullah said the order to seal the factory was issued under Section 38 of the Environmental Quality Act 1974.

She said there was no date for



A fireman spraying water into the burning sawdust pits at the illegal factory in Sungai Lembu, Bukit Mertajam, yesterday. PIC BY AMIR IRSYAD OMAR

the duration of the closure order.

"We will serve the order on the company when the fire has been put out. For now, the order is for an indefinite time period."

Several contractors collecting carbon stocks at the factory were seen leaving in a hurry when the DOE team arrived.

The illegal factory had been operating for the past 10 years, releasing unfiltered smoke from burning sawdust.

Residents of a village nearby had lodged numerous complaints against the factory, alleging

that the smoke affected their health.

The residents claimed that 11 of them had cancer allegedly due to inhaling the smoke.

However, the state Health Department said while there were cases of lung cancer in the village, it could not ascertain the cause of the disease.

Penanti assemblyman Dr Norlela Ariffin had highlighted the villagers' plight in assembly sittings.

The Seberang Prai Municipal Council (MPSP) had slapped the

factory with a mere RM250 fine.

Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng was quoted as saying that the state government did not want to take action against illegal buildings, hawker stalls and temples built before 2008 — unless they were affecting traffic or people living nearby — until an amicable solution could be reached.

On Thursday, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and other government agencies raided the illegal factory.

A follow-up raid was conducted

on MPSP's licensing department, and the office, home and service centre of state Welfare, Caring Society and Environment Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh.

Phee was later arrested with two others — the factory manager, 70, and his son, 37, who is the director.

Page 1 pic: Officers from the Department of Environment inspecting the burning sawdust pits at the illegal carbon filter factory in Sungai Lembu, Bukit Mertajam, yesterday.

'Something wrong with CAT policy if Norlela is public enemy No. 1'

GEORGE TOWN: All is not well in the Penang government's competency, accountability and transparency (CAT) policy if Penanti assemblyman Dr Norlela Ariffin is seen as the state's public enemy No. 1.

People's Alternative Party (PAP) vice-president Rahmad Isahak said Norlela, who brought to light the illegal carbon filter factory in Sungai Lembu, Bukit Mertajam, which affected the health of villagers there, should be praised and looked upon by the administration as a fine ex-

ample of a bold elected representative.

"However, if she is seen as a liability to her party, PKR, and the Penang government for championing the people's plight, then there is something not right in the administration's CAT policy.

"As far as we are concerned, Norlela has created a history of sorts in terms of dignity and integrity when she spoke up and defended her people."

Norlela told the *New Straits Times* recently that she was

looked upon as a "criminal" for bringing forward the people's problem, which subsequently led to the arrest of state Welfare, Caring Society and Environment Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh.

Norlela and her family had received threats.

Rahmad said going by the code of ethics as a responsible elected representative, Nor-



Rahmad Isahak

lela had fulfilled all the criteria.

"She was brave enough to speak up and criticise wrongdoings and weaknesses that do not benefit her people, knowing well that there would be consequences."

Last Thursday, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) and other government agencies raided the illegal factory after many

complaints fell on deaf ears.

Phee was arrested the next day after giving his statement to MACC to facilitate investigations into the factory.

Also arrested were the factory's 70-year-old manager and his 37-year-old son, a director.

Rahmad expressed hope that MACC would continue to investigate the matter and other factories operating illegally in the state.

He told a press conference yesterday that there were about 200 such factories in the state.