

KERATAN AKHBAR

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Comment 7

Start with ourselves

It is easy to do our bit for the environment by rejecting single-use straws



FOR decades, we barely gave it a second thought when our drinks were served with plastic straws as they were small, useful and, most conveniently, disposable.

In the 1960s, plastic replaced paper in the manufacturing of drinking straws, thereby changing straws from renewable to a single-use product.

And in the near 60 years since, every single plastic straw created is still filling up landfills and floating in our oceans as it will take at least 200 years for the plastic to decompose.

However, growing public concern in the past few years has inspired movements around the world to ban single-use plastics, most notably straws.

There are, of course, dissenting views on the effectiveness of the ban as some experts believe that eliminating the usage of straws would have little significance as it

comprises only 0.025% of the eight-million tonnes of plastic that end up in the oceans each year.

But activists and governments are hoping that straws will be a "gateway plastic," encouraging people to forgo other single-use plastics such as bags and bottles.

In August 2017, *The Star* reported that if one straw was used per person each day in Malaysia, 31 million plastic straws would have been used daily nationwide.

Many local councils in the Federal Territories as well as Selangor, Johor and Sarawak are — slowly but surely — already phasing out single-use plastics, including straws.

For example in 2018, the Federal Territories Ministry announced that the plastic straw ban in the Federal Territories would take effect from Jan 1, 2019 but said that enforcement would only start this year.

The rule was applicable in Putrajaya too, with Putrajaya Corporation (PPJ) spelling out the ban on plastic straws in its licensing condition effective Jan 1 last year.

The ban on plastic straws is a follow-up action to the ban on single-use plastic bags in 2017 that

was enforced in September 2018.

However, the new policy on straws exempt the sick, disabled and elderly.

Sadly, the movement is gaining slow traction although the ban of plastic straws is included as a condition of traders' business licence.

During a random survey in Kuala Lumpur, *StarMetro* found that many establishments continued to serve drinks with plastic straws as a matter of practice, without customers specially asking for them.

What was worse was that many of the customers themselves made little attempt to refuse the straws when they were served.

It is easy enough to blame the shop operators for serving drinks with plastic straws and the local authorities on the lack of enforcement, but as consumers we should be more mindful of doing our part too.

Because for most able-bodied people, the straw is something you can easily do without.

Opting out of plastic straw usage does not require a drastic change in behaviour and is one of the simplest plastics for us to reject.

While eliminating plastic straws may not have much significance, it



Metal straws are one of the alternatives that customers can bring along with them to eateries. — Filepic

allows us to reflect on the waste that we create and the cumulative effect it has.

And if you really do need a straw with a beverage, there are plenty of non-plastic options, with more entering the market every day.

Alternatives such as those made of stainless steel, bamboo, silicone and glass are now available in the market and online.

These straws come in different sizes, including those that are suitable for ice-blended drinks and

bubble tea. A case or pouch as well as brush are often included for cleaning and ease of storage.

There are also foldable and collapsible stainless steel straws that come in small cases which can fit into one's pocket.

While necessary discussions on proper waste management for the world's plastics are ongoing, it is high time we do our bit too.

The best way to keep plastic straws out of landfills is to stop using them.