

KERATAN AKHBAR



SWCorp Federal Territories director Mohd Zahir outside the courts with his enforcement team. — Filepic



An officer communicating with his team at a stake-out on illegal dumping. — Photos: FAIHAN GHANI/The Star.

Covert team goes to the ground to catch environment polluters

IT TOOK the team almost two weeks and hundreds of mosquito bites later to finally capture the culprits who had been dumping waste illegally on a piece of private land in Kepong, Kuala Lumpur.

The Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory officers from the Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Corporation (SWCorp) had staked out for days to find and observe the two individuals dumping construction waste on the land.

But they were not ready to book the culprits yet, as the officers still needed more information before they could proceed.

The information was crucial for them to charge the offenders under Section 71 (1) of the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Act 2007 (Act 672).

"In some cases, the culprits are more organised and are taking instructions from a gangster, so a team of experienced officers will be sent in to do the job," said SWCorp Federal Territories director Mohd Zahir Shaari.

"Unlike the usual enforcement team, this team is trained for covert operations where the enforcement is executed in stealth."

He elaborated that the team would conceal themselves and gather as much evidence as possible before an ambush was undertaken.

"They use gadgets such as video cameras, binoculars and walkie-talkies to gather intel and communicate with each other."

"These days the culprits dumping waste tend to do so in obscure

areas, inside jungles and remote parts and we need to be equipped to deal with them," he said.

When ready to strike, the team will make sure that exit points are blocked to prevent escape. Once caught, the equipment and machinery used for rubbish disposal will be confiscated on the spot.

"In the early days when we were first carrying out enforcement, we made the mistake of letting the culprits take back their vehicles and assets, and you will not see them again," said Mohd Zahir.

"Now everything is seized and we will open an investigation paper."

"After that we have to get Road Transport Department (JPJ), the land office and Immigration if the culprits are foreigners. It is a lot



Enforcement officers setting up their equipment to catch illegal dumpers.

of work.

"And even the rubbish has to be confiscated," he said, adding that a lot of information could be determined from the rubbish.

Mohd Zahir revealed that one time they managed to trace the rubbish to a hotel and from there it was discovered that the hotel man-

agement had no idea that the contractors were dumping the rubbish illegally.

This is one of the reasons why Mohd Zahir was hoping that those caught dumping rubbish illegally would face the full brunt of the law as a lesson to other would-be illegal dumpers.



"We recently caught a man dumping waste right in the middle of SUKE Highway. After investigating, we found out that he was contracted to dispose of the rubbish in a landfill but chose to dump it on the highway to avoid paying the tipping charges," he added.

Tipping charge is a fee paid for disposing waste at a landfill.

The fee helps the landfill operator carry out maintenance and pay for operational costs. For the disposal of construction waste from Kuala Lumpur, it costs about RM30 per lorry and waste is usually disposed of at the Sungai Kertas landfill.



Mohd Zahir showing the illegal dumping hotspots.

Tipping fees are RM49 at Bukit Tagar, RM48 at Taman Beringin in Jinjang and RM30 at Sungai Kertas in Selayang.

Regulating waste disposal
SWCorp is an agency established on June 1, 2008 under Housing and Local Government Ministry and is governed by the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Act 2007 (Act 672).

However the agency only started enforcing the Act on Sept 1, 2011 and the enforcement against illegal dumping only started in 2014.

"Prior to that, local authorities like DBKL (Kuala Lumpur City Hall) did the enforcement against illegal dumping," said Mohd Zahir.

Illegal dumping of waste is still a big problem everywhere. Local authorities have been grappling with the issue for decades.

The rampant dumping of hazardous waste is making the situa-

tion more dangerous and the culprits are no longer limited to the unlicensed contractors but licensed ones too.

Mohd Zahir said the act of illegal dumping was so frequent 10 years ago and in some cases, the culprits were brazenly doing so openly.

"But once we started regulating, it became a cat-and-mouse game with the perpetrators," he said.

"They continue to dump waste illegally, but now they do it secretly, in the wee hours of the morning and they choose remote areas on private lands and in jungles."

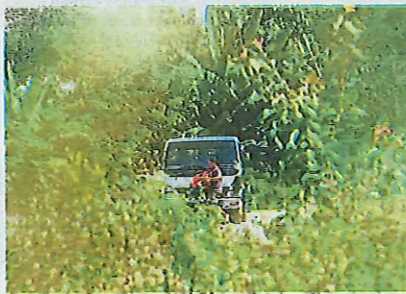
"These past few years we have quite successfully managed to map out their activities and identify hotspots where the culprits are most likely to dump waste."

He explained that there were two types of illegal dumping.

The first is run by an operator who uses people's land to dump waste.



An enforcement officer getting photographic and video evidence of culprits dumping waste illegally in Kepong.



A man spotted dumping rubbish on a private land.

"Most likely, the operator pays a certain fee to the landowner," he said.

"This is illegal because one needs a permit and licence from the authorities to dispose rubbish."

"The second is where unsuspecting landowners have no idea that their land is being used as a place to dump waste, and there are plenty of such cases in Kuala Lumpur."

Mohd Zahir elaborated that on some land, the owner or a contractor were only allowed to place sand there for construction purposes, but small-time waste collection operators who offer their services to hotels and contractors often abuse the specified given permis-

sion by turning the site into a dumping ground for all types of rubbish.

He added that after mapping out the areas of illegal dumping, the enforcement team was able to identify the hotspots which included industrial sites, graveyards, empty lands and remote highways and jungles.

"My men have found mountains of decaying rubbish dumped inside remote jungles where it is not easy to get to."

"We do not know how long the rubbish has been there but we know the perpetrators will eventually return to the site and my men will be waiting for them," he said.