

THE STAR

Integrated approach needed to fight raw water contamination

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama): Throughout 2019, the Klang Valley experienced disruptions in water supply at least nine times, a good number of which were due to contamination of the raw water supply.

Water disruptions can also be caused by technical problems, maintenance works at treatment plants, burst pipes, and high turbidity levels of the river water – but the most worrying among them is the contamination of raw water as a result of oil and diesel spills and discharge of toxic effluents into rivers by unscrupulous factory operators.

River basins are most vulnerable to pollution for that is where solid waste such as furniture and, of more concern, illegal industrial effluents are usually disposed of.

Each time the raw water source is contaminated by diesel or toxic waste, the operations at the treatment plant concerned have to be brought to a halt to prevent further damage.

According to experts, Malaysia's water treatment plants are not equipped with the facilities to treat contaminants.

Any delay in shutting down the treatment plant concerned will result in the contamination of its water by toxic substances. This will lead to longer downtime, and higher costs as well, as the plant has to be detoxified.

Lack of coordination

Last year alone, the Sungai Semenyih water treatment plant (WTP), located near the confluence of Sungai Semenyih and Sungai Langat, was closed thrice due to odour pollution believed to have been caused by the illegal discharge of toxic effluents.

About 1.5 million people or 336,930 account holders, including commercial premises such as restaurants, were affected by the resulting water cuts following the shutdown of the WTP for remedial works.

Last November, Selangor state environment, green technology, science, technology and innovation, and consumer affairs committee chairman Hee Loy Sian told the state legislative assembly that water treatment plants in the state had to be shut down 744 times from 2008 to June 2019 due to contamination.

He said the cause of the contamination included oil and diesel spills, effluents, ammonia, and high manganese content in the raw water.