



# No Plastic Bag Weekend

## NO PLASTIC BAG WEEKEND

Solid waste management is one of the environmental issues in Brunei Darussalam. According to a survey conducted by the Department of Environment, Parks and Recreation in 2005, the total amount of solid waste generated reaches to about **189,000 tonnes per year**. This means that every individual generate about **1.4kg of solid waste per day** in which it is one of the highest in the region. From the total amount of solid waste generated, **16%** is made up of plastic waste and it is largely comprise of plastic bags.

Plastic bags, better known in this country as 'Beg kerisik-kerisik' or 'Kantung kuyas-kuyas' has long been used as a convenience when shopping. Plastic bags are readily available as they are provided for free in every shops and department stores.

However, despite it's convenience, the nature of plastic bags of being durable and not being rot easily is a problem for the environment. Plastic bags take a long time to decompose and is estimated to take more than 1,000 years. In the process of decay, plastic bags also produce toxic substances that can contaminate soil and water resources in which can affects crops, plants, animals and etc. Apart from the issues of indiscriminate disposal of plastic bags, plastic bags palso oses threat to marine life and can cause death. Plastic bags that are washed away into the sea or the ocean are often mistaken for jellyfish or food for marine predators. In addition to that, plastic bags can cause drains to be clogged that may lead to flooding and also stagnant water with potential of disease outbreak such as malaria and etc.

Globally, it is estimated that 1 trillion of plastic bags are used every year. In other statistics, Taiwan uses 20 billion plastic bags per year (900 per person), Japan uses 300 billion plastic bags annually (100 each) and Australia use 6.9 billion plastic bags each year (326 plastic bags per person).

In Brunei Darussalam, through a survey conducted by the Department of Environment, Parks and Recreation in 2011 for two weekends, it is found that the use of plastic bags for one supermarket is from 3000 – 8000 bags. Of this amount, every supermarket will use 144.000 to 393.600 plastic bags each year, which it is just an estimated amount on weekends only. How about for those shopping on a week days? Milimewah Department store reported that the use of plastic bags is about 6 million a year. By estimation, if 3000 – 8000 plastic bags are used every day by every department store in the country, then 20 department stores will be using 22 - 60 million in a year.

The use of reusable bags was promoted in 2008 during the commemoration of World Environment Day by the Minister of Development. The event was launched with the collaboration of the Giant Megamall at the premise itself. On the day, reusable bags were distributed for free to shoppers. The staff of Department of Environment, Parks and Recreation were also present to give advice to shoppers on the use of the reusable bags. Following the launch, more bags were distributed to several major shopping centres such as Hua Ho Department Store, Supasave, Utama Grand, Jaya Hypermart. Not only in Brunei Muara District, the exercise was extended to all the districts. Free reusable bags were also distributed during Ramadhan at two of the major food market.

From the introduction of reusable bags, the 'No Plastic Bag Weekend' was launched to raise public awareness on the use of reusable bags. It was officially launched by the Minister of Development on 26th March 2011. The 'No Plastic Bag Day' is carried out in phases in which as a kickstart, it will be held every saturday and sunday of the week. Given the encouraging and positive response from the public, on the 16th February 2012, the initiative has been extended to include a Friday to make three days of no plastic bags. In conclusion, it is expected that this initiative can achieve the target of the government towards improving the level of recycling in this country to 10% in 2015 and 15% in 2020.

