

My parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

1 Good morning, everyone. Thank you for taking time out to join us this morning.

2 Today's focus group discussion is part of a series of consultations on the Zero Waste Masterplan. The Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and the National Environment Agency have engaged widely over the past year, and gained many useful insights from the community, businesses and NGOs. Some of you would have taken part in our online public consultation last month. We thank you for your ideas and suggestions, which will help us formulate an actionable and sustainable Masterplan to become a Zero Waste Nation.

Circular Economy and Recycling

3 Two weeks ago, at an earlier focus group, I spoke about the need to go beyond the 3Rs and for a circular economy approach to manage and conserve our resources. We explored ways to encourage a zero waste mindset, and to reduce food waste, packaging waste and e-waste; because reducing waste is a key part of our journey towards zero waste.

4 Today, we want to talk about one of the key enablers of the circular economy, and that is recycling. It is through recycling that we can collect back items which might otherwise have been trashed. We can convert these into useful products such as construction materials and furniture, or extract valuable resources such as precious metals from e-waste. Recycling enables us to turn trash to treasure. It allows us to keep our precious and finite resources in use for as long as possible by extending their lifespan thus helping us to close the waste loop just like we have closed the water loop.

5 To better understand households' recycling behaviour, MEWR and NEA conducted two public surveys between June 2018 and February 2019. Let me share some key findings with you.

60 Per Cent of Households Recycle Regularly

6 About 60 per cent of Singaporean households surveyed indicated that they recycle regularly. This is very encouraging. The most common channel used for recycling was blue recycling bins. 56 per cent of those who recycle regularly use the blue bins at least once a week. The next most common recycling modes were charity or social programmes that collect recyclable items, followed by the karang guni man.

7 Convenience was one of the most commonly cited reasons for recycling regularly. In addition, habits, encouragement by the Government, moral concerns about being “wasteful”, and the feeling that one should match others’ recycling efforts were also important motivators of recycling.

8 Among those who were not recycling regularly, the top reason cited was that they had too few items to recycle. Other commonly cited reasons were that they did not usually think about recycling, or they were too busy or tired. These findings will be useful as we think about how we can encourage more households to recycle.

The Need to Recycle Right

9 Beyond getting more households to recycle, we also need to ensure that we recycle right. About 70 per cent of respondents thought that contaminated items such as soiled paper food packaging are recyclable. Significant numbers of respondents also thought that non-recyclables such as styrofoam, toys and ceramics can be recycled. These misconceptions help explain why 40 per cent of items collected from our blue recycling bins cannot be recycled. This is even more so when the top items recycled were paper materials like newspapers and magazines which are susceptible to contamination by food and liquids.

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10 Clearly, we must continue to raise awareness of what can and cannot be recycled. In our public online consultation, 70 per cent of respondents supported the redesign of labels on the blue recycling bins to provide more information on recycling. NEA is working on redesigning the blue bin label and testing it with users; and the new label will be introduced later this year.

Co-creating Solutions

11 Moving towards zero waste will require strong partnerships and a whole-of-nation effort. Today’s focus group is a good opportunity for us to delve deeper into possible ways to address our challenges in recycling. By bringing together multiple perspectives and harnessing our different strengths, we will be in a better position to co-create effective solutions.

12 After today's discussions, we intend to organise a citizens' workgroup to get Singaporeans involved in the development and implementation of #RecycleRight solutions. We want citizens to not just identify issues or propose solutions, but to work with us to implement the recommendations. The workgroup will have access to resource persons who can share their expertise and experience to enrich the group's discussions. This way, Singaporeans will be involved in working alongside with us to encourage households to recycle more and recycle right. More details will be announced in the coming months.

Conclusion

13 As long as we work together, I am confident that we will make great strides towards our vision of a Zero Waste Nation. I look forward to your valuable contributions.

14 Thank you and I wish you a fruitful discussion.

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