

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 Good morning. It is my pleasure to be here to launch the “Say YES to Waste Less” campaign. I would like to thank IKEA for hosting the event and all partners for joining us today.

Towards a Zero Waste Nation

2 Singapore faces a growing waste problem. In 2018, we generated 7.7 million tonnes of solid waste, enough to fill approximately 15,000 Olympic-size swimming pools. At the current rate of waste disposal, Semakau Landfill, our only landfill, will run out of space by 2035. As most of us are aware, building more landfills is not a sustainable option for our land-scarce nation.

3 My ministry designated 2019 as the Year Towards Zero Waste to build greater awareness among Singaporeans and those who live and work here, on the urgent need to treasure our precious resources and protect our environment. To achieve our vision of a Zero Waste Nation, we need to make it a habit to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle Right, or what we call the 3Rs, and adopt a zero waste mindset in everything that we do.

The Problem with Disposables

4 There are many ways in which we can practise the 3Rs. One area where we can certainly do more in, is reducing the use of disposables such as plastic bags and takeaway containers.

5 In 2018, disposables made up about 164,500 tonnes of domestic waste. This is about 10 per cent of domestic waste disposed of, and approximately equivalent in volume to 300 Olympic-size swimming pools. These were mostly used once and not recycled. While we incinerate them at our waste-to-energy plants, the process of doing so increases our carbon footprint. The resources that go into producing and transporting disposables also contribute to carbon emissions, which compounds the problem.

6 Many people use paper-based disposables such as paper bags and cups, as well as bio- or oxo-degradable alternatives as they perceive these to be eco-friendly alternatives to plastic-based disposables. However, the fact is that the

production and disposal of all materials have some degree of environmental impact.

7 Hence, the issue is not the type of disposable bags or containers to use. Instead, we should avoid all kinds of disposables as much as we can, and opt for reusable options. According to a study released last year by the Singapore Environment Council, consumers in Singapore take 820 million plastic bags from supermarkets each year, or two to four plastic bags per person per trip^[1]. Now, imagine the number of disposable bags we can cut back on if each of us chooses to use reusable bags instead, and get our friends and family members to do the same.

8 Another disposable which we can reduce our usage of is straws. As part of the World Wide Fund for Nature's Plastic ACTion, or PACT, initiative, more than 270 local food and beverage outlets here will stop providing plastic straws by 1 July unless requested. I commend WWF and its partners for this initiative. Riding on this initiative, we can do even more. Regardless of the material they are made of, we should try to avoid using straws to cut wastage of resources and reduce our carbon footprint. Simple changes to our lifestyles like these can make a significant difference to our environment.

Reducing PET bottles

9 PET bottles are another cause for concern. According to the SEC study, about 467 million PET bottles are used in Singapore each year. This means each person uses one to three PET bottles each week on average.

10 A common use of PET bottles is bottled water. But in Singapore, the quality of our tap water actually exceeds minimum World Health Organization (WHO) and US Environmental Protection Agency standards. It is perfectly safe to drink. If we carry a reusable bottle and fill it up with drinking water from the tap when we are on the go, we can easily reduce the use of PET bottles, while saving money at the same time. And there are health benefits too. By consuming less bottled beverages such as soft drinks and more plain water from the tap, we also reduce our intake of sugar and processed beverages and stay healthier.

Partners in Say YES to Waste Less

11 NEA is launching the “Say YES to Waste Less” campaign today, to encourage all of us to say yes to reusables, and increase their use in our daily lives. I am very heartened by the strong support from the People, Private and Public, or 3P, sectors for this nation-wide campaign.

12 Over the next three months, 59 partners covering over 1,600 premises such as retailers, supermarkets, food and beverage establishments, hotels, Community Development Councils, grassroots organisations, schools and non-governmental organisations will be encouraging the community to reduce the use of disposables.

13 Their initiatives include displaying campaign visuals at cashier points, prompting customers to bring reusable bags or opt out of receiving disposable cutlery with online orders, and removing bottled water from meeting rooms. Schools and youth groups will also be carrying out activities to nudge the community towards lifestyle changes that reduce the use of disposables. IKEA, for example, is working to inspire and enable people to reduce disposables. IKEA Tampines will be putting up a huge banner calling on Singaporeans to “choose to reuse” and the store is now promoting products like reusable food containers, water bottles and reusable bags. This weekend, there are even colouring activities and storytelling sessions to raise awareness for the “Say Yes to Waste Less” campaign among children.

Conclusion

14 Let me conclude. Our collective efforts to conserve our resources today will pave the way towards a sustainable environment for future generations. So let’s make the right choice. Choose reusables and Say YES to Waste Less.

Thank you.

[1] <http://www.sec.org.sg>