

Good morning everyone.

Introduction

1. I would like to thank all of you for spending your Saturday with us, and committing your time to join us for the next three sessions. This is our Ministry's very first Citizens' Workgroup, and we are heartened by your support.

Current Household Recycling Landscape

2. We have chosen to focus on household recycling for this Citizens' Workgroup, because there is much that we can do on this front. Recent surveys conducted by the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (or MEWR) and the National Environment Agency (or NEA) indicated that while six in 10 households recycle regularly, many people still lack knowledge in how to recycle correctly. This explains why our blue recycling bins have a high contamination rate. About 40 per cent of the items deposited inside the blue bins do not get recycled because they are either non-recyclable items or are recyclables that have been soiled by food and liquid waste.

3. If we can improve the way we recycle, we can keep our finite resources in use for as long as possible. By turning trash into treasure, we can close our waste loop and move towards a circular economy approach to resource management. This is important for Singapore because Semakau Landfill, our only landfill, will be completely filled by 2035 if we continue our current rate of waste generation. Last year, Singapore generated almost 8 million tonnes of waste, equivalent to the weight of 530,000 double-decker buses! We must change our current habits, and save Semakau Landfill by diverting the waste bound for it.

Recent Developments on Government Efforts

4. Just last month, I launched Singapore's inaugural Zero Waste Masterplan. This was an important step in our transition towards a circular economy, and becoming a Zero Waste Nation. The Masterplan charts the Government's strategies to build a sustainable, resource-efficient and climate-resilient Singapore, and also sets a new waste reduction target for Singapore – to reduce the waste sent to Semakau Landfill by 30 per cent by 2030. If we can achieve this, we will be able to extend the lifespan of Semakau Landfill beyond 2035.

5. Earlier this month, my ministry also passed the Resource Sustainability Bill in Parliament, another significant milestone in our Zero Waste journey. The Bill puts in place legislative powers to tackle electrical and electronic waste, food waste, and packaging waste including plastics. These are the three priority waste streams identified by MEWR and NEA, for they are generated in large quantities but have relatively low recycling rates.

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Co-Creating Environmental Solutions with 3P Partners

6. While the Government will continue to drive these Zero Waste efforts, we cannot run this race alone. Over the years, MEWR and the NEA have worked closely with our partners from the 3P (people, private and public) sectors to undertake collective action for the environment. For example, to prepare for the Masterplan, we sought views from diverse stakeholders. We consulted more than 250 companies through industry engagements, conducted door-to-door surveys with more than 5,000 households, received more than 1,300 contributions through our online public consultation, held seven focus group discussions and a dialogue.

7. The NEA also recently launched a new label for our blue recycling bins. The new design provides clearer information on what can and cannot be recycled, and was a product of our extensive partner engagements.

8. MEWR has also partnered the National Youth Council (NYC) to tap on youth perspectives on our environmental policies and initiatives. Our engagement with youth leaders will help us better understand Singaporean youths' views and aspirations, and empower them to build a more environmentally-conscious Singapore for the future.

9. I am also privileged to be the advisor to the Climate Action SG Alliance (CASA), which was formed during the Year of Climate Action in 2018. Comprising 20 members who are leaders in their respective 3P sectors, CASA hopes to raise awareness on climate change and drive collective positive action. Last year, CASA launched a three-part video series which focused on: i) the need to reduce single-use plastics; ii) what can and cannot be recycled; and iii) how recyclables are sorted after collection. In this Year Towards Zero Waste, I am happy to share that two members of CASA, SembCorp and Eco-business, have come together to produce a timely video on the importance of recycling right. You will enjoy a preview of this video after my speech.

Taking Co-Creation Efforts Further

10. Today's Citizens' Workgroup marks a new chapter in our efforts to build strong partnerships with businesses, individuals and organisations, and tap on your unique strengths, experiences and ideas, to co-create and co-deliver pragmatic solutions to make Singapore more sustainable.

11. I am very heartened by the overwhelming response by citizens to join this Workgroup - more than 300 members of the public responded to our call, and 49 members have now come together in this workgroup today. Members of the workgroup represent a diverse group of citizens, who have committed to attend and contribute in all four sessions. I understand that some of you do not recycle actively, and yet you have chosen to join us to co-create solutions to improve household recycling habits. This reflects a growing public commitment to take action to resolve our environmental challenges.

12. This is just the beginning of our efforts to work closer together with Singaporeans. We plan to convene a second Workgroup to look at how we can reduce the excessive consumption of single-use plastics. We will also continue to expand avenues to co-create solutions with Singaporeans to address evolving environmental challenges. By working together, we can go further and do more in our journey towards a Sustainable Singapore.

13. I wish you a fruitful discussion, and look forward to hearing your views.

Thank you.

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