Headline	All out to check plastic waste crisis		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	18 Jan 2019	Language	English
Circulation	201,943	Readership	605,829
Section	Nation	Page No	13
ArticleSize	358 cm²	Journalist	MEI MEI CHU
PR Value	RM 57,514		

On the ground: Yeo (facing camera) and the raiding party at the illegal plastic recycling factory in Telok Gong, Klang.

All out to check plastic waste crisis

Ministry aims to close all illegal factories nationwide

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KLANG: The Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Ministry is stepping up efforts to mitigate Malaysia's plastic waste crisis.

It will start by shutting down 100 illegal plastic waste recycling factories nationwide by the first quarter of this year.

Its minister Yeo Bee Yin said she gave the Department of Environment this target as the nation is still plagued by plastic waste which was imported before the July 2018 freeze.

The ministry has detected 97 illegal factories nationwide – 61 in Selangor, 10 in Kedah, 10 in Negri Sembilan, seven in Perak, six in Johor, two in Penang and one in Kelantan.

"We are aware there are many more and we will continue to shut down all illegal factories nationwide," she said during a joint operation raid of an illegal plastic recycling factory in Telok Gong here yesterday.

She said as Port Klang is located in Selangor, the state has emerged as a hotspot for illegal plastic waste factories that are illegally dumping and burning plastic scraps that cannot be recycled.

Yeo said, the ministry found 38 illegal factories in Kuala Langat and another 16 in Klang.

The government took action by shutting down illegal factories after reports of illegal plastic waste recycling factories mushrooming in Selangor, Johor and Penang.

But residents claimed that the factories quietly resumed operations and continued to pollute the air and the river with toxic discharge.

To this, Yeo said Tenaga Nasional Berhad will be asked to cut electricity supply to the factories.

She said the government will also be conducting checks on licensed plastic recycling factories to ensure they comply with the Environmental Quality Act 1974.

Out of the 48 legal plastic recycling factories in Selangor, 20 were found to be polluting the environment and have been shut down, she added.

"Should any legal plastic recycling factory be caught for violating the regulations, it can be fined, and faces the possibility of its operations being closed down."

She added that the ministry has opened 36 investigation papers into the operators of the illegal factories.

"Any plastic waste that we seize will be auctioned off or destroyed. The Housing and Local Government Ministry will enforce this to make sure the plastic factories do not shift to other locations," she said.

Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin was quoted as saying that only 19 out of 114 plastic waste AP (approved permit) holders currently pass requirements to import plastic scraps into the country.

A 2018 joint investigation into plastic recycling factories in Kuala Langat by Greenpeace Malaysia and the Kuala Langat Environmental Protection Association found plastic waste was imported from over 19 countries.

The report said that between January and July, Malaysia imported 754,000 tonnes of plastic valued at RM483mil.

However, only 9% of this plastic waste are clean plastic that can be recycled, Greenpeace said.

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