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Garbage - is it really a problem for your family?

The present way of handling the garbage problem by some local authorities is harmful says Dr. Mrs. Ajantha Perera

The garbage is simply dumped onto a marsh. At dump sites there are no drains to collect the leachate or the rainwater seeping from the garbage piles, hence, they overflow into the neighbouring areas. During rain, the water which flows through the garbage piles wash off all dissolvable material and this water enters the nearby waterways and even houses. Much of this water contains disease causing micro-organisms. Bacterial and Viral diseases can spread rapidly.

The bad odour from the garbage piles as they are dumped, and turned over by the dozers becomes unbearable to the surrounding communities. In fact, many people in the neighbourhood, get headaches and the children find it difficult to study. The world of the children in these areas is uncomfortable, and they have to work hard to adjust, and eventually after many struggles they accept it. Unfortunately these children begin to resent the outside world.

Some of the Municipal Councils are dumping their garbage, where the temporary houses of the nearby

community are built, and these houses almost border the garbage piles. Most of these houses are made of wooden planks or tin sheets. Since most of these houses are approximately 10 ft by 10 ft the complete floor area gets covered by water. In fact, many small children were seen sleeping on the unclean floor. Some were seen just sleeping on that water. The overflowing toilet pits too gets dissolved in the rain water flowing into many of these houses. It is a well-known fact that approximately 5.2 million people die each year in the world, primarily in the developing countries due to the spread of viral and bacterial diseases from the garbage piles. Yet it is also the public who throw their garbage to the roadside.

Garbage piles on the roadside - who is responsible?

It has become a common practice that bags of garbage are left near the entrance to the house by individual house owners to be collected by the Local Authorities. Keeping ones waste in buckets or bags in front of one's own house is understandable, yet the problem arises when the

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garbage piles are scattered all over the roadside, even in front of other people's houses expecting the local authorities to collect them.

The garbage left in areas which are not owned by a person such as abandoned lands, roadside, abandoned building, since they remain there for a long time becomes sites where mosquito breeding and enhanced breeding of pathogenic organisms occur.

What are the steps to be taken by you to solve the garbage problem?

It is often easy to blame someone

else for the garbage problem that exists in your home; So, let me ask you a few questions. Do you buy from your heart or your brain? Do you plan in your mind before you reach the shop? Do you allow yourself to be deceived through advertising and glitter and elegant unnecessary packaging? If you think a little you can avoid paying for garbage.

The local authority may, through the public health inspectors, the environmental officers and the community development officers

communicate to you that a change in attitude towards garbage management is needed and invite you for a meeting. You must participate in these events and listen to their views. Don't let your pride and your business keep you away.

When the local authority selects roads for solid waste management programs, offer your road for a pilot project. This will enable you to learn more about the solutions to the waste generated from your home, as well as gain an opportunity to work with your neighbours.

You must separate the garbage at home into paper, glass, plastics, tins and coconut shells by putting them into separate bags or boxes. Give many of these items to the people who go pushing a cart.

Don't ever throw your garbage as a mixed pile. Once it's mixed no one can separate them. Once contaminated, they cannot be used for recycling. If you give to the garbage trucks as separated items, the garbage workers collect the separated items and sell them to the recycling industry. Insist that the local authority collects the separat-

ed waste materials on a fixed day. Get the names and numbers of the persons responsible for collection.

Insist that the Local Authority give you a compost bin at a reasonable price. If you have a garden please make compost by simply putting all your degradable waste to one place and mixing them with leaves. Turn the pile of the degradable waste at least twice per week so that it receives sufficient oxygen that no odour can be detected. Make a compost bin with wooden sticks. If the local authority decides to maintain a smallscale disposal site within a given area then insist that they must also look after the needs of the neighbouring community within 500m from the site, such as provide drinking water to the individual houses of the neighbourhood, provide electricity for neighbourhood, improve the health centres of the area, and improve the roads. If we truly love our nation, then we will protect its soil. The air and water will leave our land but the soil will remain as our mother nation. So, let's not throw garbage onto the soil, rather recycle them.

If there are questions, call Dr. Mrs. Ajantha Perera, Founder, National Programme on Recycling of Solid Waste, 0112 509950/ 0112 503184/ ajanper@slt-net.lk