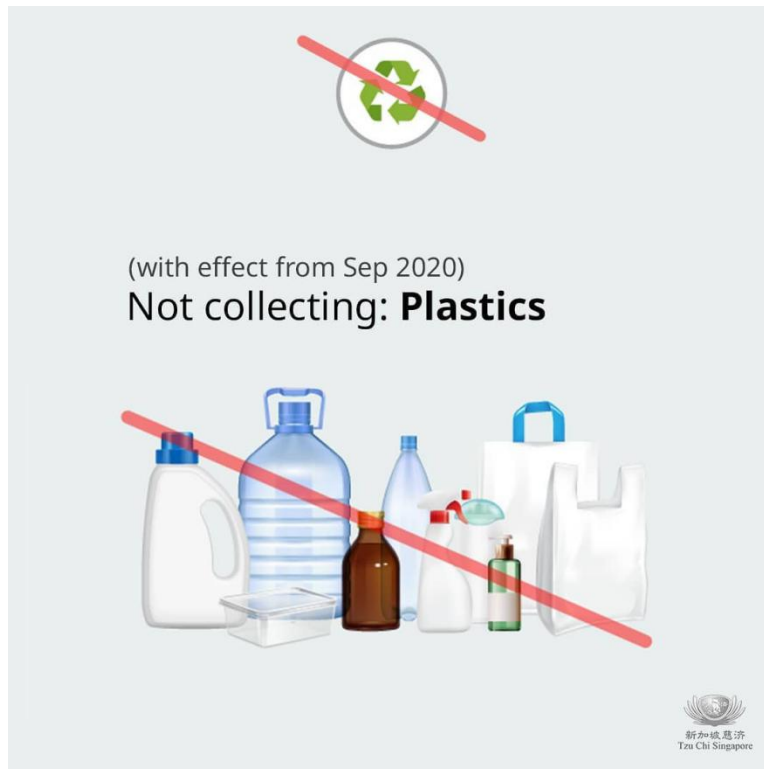


Tzu Chi Pledges to Promote Plastics Waste Minimisation and Environmental Education

Media Press Release



Tzu Chi Singapore is no longer collecting plastics recyclables with effect from 26 September 2020. The decision to stop accepting used plastics at Tzu Chi's Eco Awareness Centre and soon-to-be-resumed recycling locations was driven by the following reasons. First, plastics are made from petroleum. With oil prices dropping, the cost of manufacturing new plastics is now cheaper than that of recycling plastics; and thus, decreasing the global demand and value of recycled plastics.

Secondly, there are limited avenues to export plastics waste for recycling because many countries have banned the importation of plastics waste from overseas sources. Lastly, in the local recyclables collection industry and within our subcontractors' network, there is currently no company buying or accepting plastics waste from us.

The Impact of COVID-19

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, Tzu Chi had engaged a handful of recycling subcontractors to collect recyclables from our [39 recycling locations](#) island wide (currently suspended due to the ongoing pandemic) and our [Eco Awareness Centre](#) in Woodlands, which has resumed operation weekly since 26 September 2020.

Challenges have been oncoming but manageable before the pandemic. Demand for used plastics declined further after several more countries banned the importation of plastics waste last year. The plunge of crude oil prices early this year was the last triggering factor for plastics waste management to be continued sustainably.

The onset and spread of COVID-19 affected global trades, making it even tougher to export plastic waste for recycling. Hence, all our sub-contractors requested to stop the collection of plastics from our recycling activities.

Local Dilemma from Current Global Market

Many countries are staying committed to their Conference of the Parties (COP) pledges, and more countries are now not accepting foreign recycling wastes. With Singapore being reliant heavily on overseas recycling plants, Recycling is no longer a sustainable solution to manage local plastic waste.

The optimal solution is to lead an eco-sustainable lifestyle, which explains Tzu Chi's focus of environmental mission i.e. the advocating of "**Sustainability at Source**" by applying **5Rs** into our daily lives. The main emphasis of our 5R philosophy is on the first "**R**" - **Refuse**, followed by **Reduce**, **Reuse**, **Repair** and lastly being **Recycle**.

Community Locations as Learning Platforms of Eco-Sustainability

Before COVID-19, "Monthly Recycling Day" has been held at locations in the community island wide on every second Sunday of the month. The "Monthly Recycling Day" is now renamed as "Environmental Sustainability Day" to emphasise on the core concept of environmental protection, and that is to maintain an eco-sustainable lifestyle.

In collaboration with grassroots organisations, our locations are mainly located at the void-decks of HDBs. Apart from recyclables' segregation, these locations also serve as learning platforms to promote eco-sustainable lifestyle. Everyone is welcome to join our volunteers in the monthly activity at their neighbourhood.

Our volunteers have been promoting eco awareness concepts to the public for more

than 21 years, since the establishment of our first recycling location in Jurong East. For the past decades, our recycling locations have been well-received by schools, institutions and organisations to learn about and experience our 5R philosophy.

In order to minimise plastic waste, participants are encouraged to bring their own cutleries for lunch, which was provided after the monthly activity. Meatless lunch was one of our approaches to promote [sustainable diet](#), which is proven as an effective way to cut down on carbon footprint as well.

Segregation as Reminder to Waste Minimisation

The act of segregating commingled recyclables into respective material-type recyclables serves as a reminder for participants on the high volume of wastes generated domestically, which could be reduced with a more conscious 5R lifestyle. As different subcontractors adopt different categorisation of recyclables as a result of their operating procedures, our volunteers and members of public adapted to the varied categorisations in order to improve the recycling rate.

Nevertheless, it is most challenging to segregate plastics due to the complex chemical properties of different plastics materials. It is not easy to educate the public to perform the optimal segregation of plastics before they could be sent for effective recycling. Tzu Chi Singapore had spent at least 20 years in eco education before succeeding in getting only clean plastic waste from the general public.

After years of conducting the regular monthly recycling activity and consistent advocacy of “recycle right” by our devoted volunteers, participating residents would clean their recyclables before passing them to us. Pre-COVID-19, Tzu Chi Singapore had the cleanest residential plastic waste collection.

Our Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Role: Past and Future

The environmental mission of Tzu Chi Singapore started in 1994, a year after the establishment of Tzu Chi Foundation Singapore. During the early days, volunteers had to conduct door-to-door recyclables collections using their own grocery trolleys and personal vehicles. The mode may have varied to address changing social conditions over the years, but our role as an NGO remains unchanged.

The advocacy of an eco-sustainable lifestyle is the main objective of our environmental mission. By collaborating with both public and private sectors, we hope to create a green sustainable society in Singapore.

To increase public's awareness on the issue of plastic waste, Tzu Chi Singapore is also hosting our second webinar titled "Climate Emergency: YOUth Action - Bubbles Double Plastic Trouble?" on 7th November 2020 from 1.30pm to 3pm.

Last but not least, we sincerely welcome any collaboration with interested media platforms to promote an eco-sustainable lifestyle.



Tzu Chi Singapore's first recycling point in Jurong East in 1999.



Public engagement of Monthly Recycling Activity before COVID-19.

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