

Public urged to reduce plastic use

Faiza Ilyas | June 06, 2018



DR Nuzhat Khan speaks at the seminar on Tuesday.

KARACHI: Highlighting threats plastic pollution posed to human life and environment, speakers at a seminar organised in connection with World Environment Day on Tuesday at a hotel underscored the role public could play in tackling the challenge by reducing the use of plastic in daily life.

The programme titled Impacts of plastic pollution on our life was jointly organised by the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) and the National

Forum for Environment and Health (NEFH).

Sharing her concerns, Dr Nuzhat Khan, a senior scientist representing the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), spoke about how marine debris was adversely affecting the coast and marine life and said that the issue had recently attracted a lot of international debate and discussion and a number of research papers, exploring the different dimensions of the subject, were also available today.

‘Waste recycling is a money-making business’

This year, she pointed out, World Oceans Day, Earth Day and World Environment Day, all had been dedicated to creating awareness of plastic pollution.

“Being cheap, light and durable, plastic was believed to be the most convenient thing. But, the world has realised now that it’s the most inconvenient thing in life,’ she said.

Speaking about Pakistan, she said the country had a 1,000-kilometre-long coastline, much of it was part of Balochistan which, fortunately, so far had largely remained in its natural form unlike the Karachi coastline, country’s lifeline and the hub of industrial activities.

“So is the case with other metropolitan cities in the world ,” she said, regretting that absence of a solid waste collection and management system in the province due to which much of this waste ended into the sea.

The lack of a waste disposal mechanism, she said, had led people to burn solid waste, including plastic, a major source of air pollution, containing toxic gases, including dioxin.

Her presentation included glimpses of the Karachi fish harbour, Gizri and Korangi creeks being ruined by different forms of waste, including cattle dung.

Waste recycling

Suggesting solutions, she said opportunities were available and there was a need to learn lessons from other countries, for instance, India where low density plastic was being added to road construction material for firmness.

“Waste recycling is a money-making business. There is a need to create awareness and people should be encouraged to take up this venture,” she said, adding that people should avoid using single-use plastic bags.

Saquib Hussain, a senior environmentalist, acting as a moderator cited a survey which showed that people in Karachi were paid to dump solid waste along the coast, a strategy to reclaim land.

“Practically speaking, we don’t have landfill sites but rather waste dumping sites. There is a need to decentralise system since the cost to transport waste to far-flung areas is too high,” he said.

M. Afrasiyab of Business Dynamics gave a presentation on oxo-biodegradable plastic and explained to the audience how normal plastic was made biodegradable with the help of an additive.

Waqar Hussain Phulpoto, the Sepa director and chief guest at the event, spoke about the agency’s efforts in curbing the plastic menace.

“In limited resources, we are doing our utmost to tackle environmental issues and believe that the challenge posed by plastic pollution could only be effectively addressed through joint efforts from all stakeholders,” he said, adding that the department had prosecuted dozens of governmental agencies for violation of environmental laws.

According to him, 20 million kilograms of flexible plastic had been converted into biodegradable plastic since 2015 due to Sepa efforts.

Dr Moinuddin Ahmed, representing Geolinks (Pvt) Ltd, emphasised the need for research on how plastic was affecting public health and environment.

Imran Sabir from Sepa, senior journalist Afia Salam, retired Commodore Zafar Iqbal from Bahria Foundation, retired Brigadier Tariq from Engro (Thar coal project) also spoke.

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