Polythene baddies hammered from tomorrow

By Malwana Rodrigo

The Central Environment Authority (CEA) will soon next month start systematically begin raiding the manufacturers and sellers that do not comply with the ban on polythene less than 30 microns in thickness.

"In January, we made some raids and these found guilty had been given chance to adjust their mistakes," says a CEA spokesman.

The manufacture, sale or use of polythene less than 30 microns in thickness was banned from 2007 under the National Environment Act under the directives of the President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The ban was later extended to the rest of the environment.

The law has been properly implemented.

The thickness of polythene sheets is measured in microns—1 micron being 0.001 millimeter. These thinner polythene sheets are mostly used in shopping bags or ‘’stil sili’’ bags, lunch sheet and other packaging materials.

Any form of polythene or plastic takes hundreds of years to decay, polluting the environment, but thinner polythene is more evil as it cannot be recycled.

It causes the emission of poisonous gases such as dioxin, so such polythene ends up in garbage dumps.

Dumps are clogged with the saplings, creating floods. Animals such as cattle also feed on polythene bags found on rubbish heaps and become ill or die.

The waste collected in these disposed bags and wrappers can collect rainwater, making breeding grounds for mosquitoes that spread diseases such as dengue.

Polythene dumped in waters ways finds its way into the ocean, choking and killing marine life.

According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Environment under the directives of the President Mahinda Rajapaksa, about 400 metric tonnes of polythene and plastics are imported into Sri Lanka yearly, causing pollution and the destruction of the environment.

Following the ban, the CEA is now focusing its activities on the recycling of polythene and other plastic products.

It takes about 500 to 1000 years for these polythene waste to decay.

Daily use of lunch sheets in SL: 15 million

Easy ways to reduce your plastic waste

- Use cloth shopping bags
- Stop buying bottled water
- Choose cardboard over plastic bags,
- Say no to straws
- Skip the disposable razor

“A man who supplies ‘stil sili’ bags to shops in Pettah”

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Used in Export trade 30% (150,000 MT)

For domestic use 70% (150,000 MT)

Recycled 40% (140,000 MT)

Became waste 60% (210,000 MT)

Daily use of Shopping bags 20 million

It is estimated that about 50 per cent of the plastics and thicker polythene is being recycled. The CEA currently has six recycling plants in operation and two more are being constructed. About 10 firms involved in plastic recycling are registered with the CEA and this number is expected to increase.

Worryingly, 40 per cent of the plastic and polythene used domestically ends up in garbage dumps.

The situation hasn’t the ban on thin polythene will be effective. In Bangladesh, which banned the use of polythene bags in early 2000s, media reports say polythene is making illegal comeback.

A change in consumer attitude is key to the success of the strategy. Experts recommend that the widespread teaching of the ill-practices, silence, reuse, and recycle. As consumers, we all have the power to influence a polythene bag to when it is not necessary and we can carry by usable bags.”