

EVER ALARMING PROBLEMS OF PLASTIC

Ahmed Hassaan Zuhair



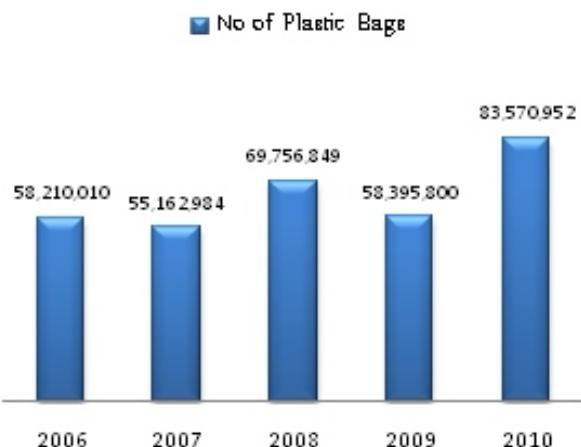
With industrial revolution human beings have developed innovative ideas and new inventions. With such ideas plastic came into existence. One may presume that plastics are beneficial. Momentarily they may seem beneficial, yet in the long run plastics are a severe hazard to the environment. Due to its long durability plastic degrade slowly. They remain in the environment for hundreds and thousands of years causing devastating effects that profoundly destroys the environment and ultimately threatens the existence of our very own being.



It is hard to argue the fact that waste management has become a huge problem in today's world, with landfills growing to enormous sizes and recycling rates remaining dismally low. The number of plastics produced worldwide and subsequently discarded by consumers has only exacerbated this problem.

In Maldives, the problem of plastic is still a coexisting major concern. According to the statistical data received from Maldives Customs Service a staggering 325 million plastic bags were imported to the Maldives during 2006 - 2010. Of these five years, 2010 represented the highest degree of import contributing to nearly 87 million plastic bags for that year alone. Nevertheless these data do not indicate a precise amount of plastic bags used in the country, as however surprising it may seem, it is true that plastic bags are even manufactured in this tiny nation.

Import of Plastic Bags in Maldives



Import of Raw Materials Required for Making Plastic Bags in Maldives

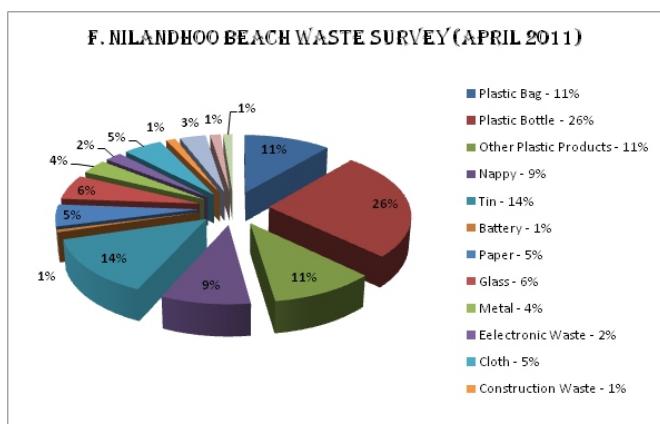


Source: Product Import Data of Maldives Customs Service 2006 - 2010

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Estimates suggest that plastic bags take 500 to 1000 years to decompose. As they slowly decompose, plastic bags break into tiny pieces and leach toxic chemicals into the environment. On land, plastic bags are one of the most prevalent types of litter in inhabited areas, becoming an eyesore to local residents. At their worst, plastic bags can clog drainage systems and contribute to flooding. When plastic bags are washed out to sea, they pose a threat to marine life. Once in the ocean, these bags can strangle marine life or, if ingested, can choke or cause marine animals to starve to death. Some marine animals including sea turtles and dolphins have been killed as a result of ingestion of plastic bags.



The beach waste survey conducted in April 2011 in one of the islands of the Maldives; Faafu Nilandhoo also reveals that the majority of wastes generated in the island are in fact products of plastic. The survey was conducted by the students and teachers of Faafu Atoll Education Center (FAEC) under the guidance of a team from the Environment Department visiting the island. A total of 9066 waste materials residing along the shoreline and beach area were collected, segregated and grouped. The results showed that 57 percent of the wastes were plastic materials of which 26 percent were categorized as plastic bottles, 11 percent as plastic bags, 9 percent as diapers and 11 percent as other products of plastic. Other significant contributors found were mostly tin, paper, metal and cloth. Local residents usually throw garbage

near the beach due to lack of proper waste management sites. Furthermore, garbage compounds in islands are usually located in close proximity to the beach compounding the problem. The waste found near the beach ultimately gets washed away into the sea, terrorizing the underwater life, damaging the coral reefs and in turn affecting the island at various degrees.



Since its invention, plastic has become extensively used in almost all spheres of life. Human beings have become so attached to it, that plastic has become a ubiquitous part of our lives. But due to the enormity of the threat that it pose to our environment, we need to think twice before using it. Mother Nature has taken care of us for ages. Now it's time for us to repay the service, even if it means to sacrifice a few things and alter our daily livelihood to achieve those goals. As part of this world it is our duty to preserve and nourish this wonderful gift from God, for the betterment of us and for the survival of generations to come.

NO TO PLASTIC BAGS CAMPAIGN

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In view of minimizing the negative impacts of plastic bags and increasing the awareness of the community towards the decimating effects of plastic bags, a “No to plastic bags” campaign was conducted in the month of June.

Inauguration of the Campaign: The campaign was launched in Artificial Beach on this year's World Environment Day (WED). Several stalls that displayed a variety of environment related activities such as games, display of recycled products and art materials were exhibited by various environmental NGOs of Maldives. The campaign was officially inaugurated by the Minister of Housing and Environment, Mr. Mohamed Aslam.



Door to Door Program: A program specifically targeted for local residents of the houses in Male' was conducted on 10th and 11th of June. A combined total of 30 students from Scout Association of Maldives (SAM), Maldives Girl Guides Association (MGGA) & Maldives National Cadet Corps (MNCC) dispersed in to 10 groups, visited more than 3000 houses and gave information about the negative impacts of plastic bags, encouraged the public to reduce the consumption of plastic bags and urged the community to choose a better and environmental friendly lifestyle. Each group was also accompanied by a staff of Maldives Police Services (MPS), to safeguard the well being of the students. In this program 3000 leaflets and stickers were distributed to several households.



Program for small shops: To enhance the probability of small shops with limited facilities to participate in the campaign, a program targeted for small shops was carried out in Male' on 9th, 10th & 11th of June. This program was jointly organized by the Maldives Volunteers Corps (MVC), a voluntary organization and Tree Maldives, an environmental NGO. A total of 50 volunteers from both groups participated in carrying out the activity. Under this program volunteers delivered application forms to the doorsteps of the shops and assisted the shopkeepers in filling the forms on spot. In addition a total of 1500 non woven bags were divided and distributed among the shops that had registered to participate in the campaign.



Banning Plastic Bags for Six Days: Several companies, organizations, businesses and individuals across the country joined hands to ban and minimize the consumption of plastic bags from June 15 – 20.



Closing Ceremony: In the closing ceremony, certificates were awarded to the participants of the campaign and those who contributed to the campaign at various degrees. The statistical data of the campaign were also presented in this ceremony, which showed that a total of 55,628 plastic bags were reduced from 65 shops in Male' during the period of the campaign.

6TH PROVINCIAL ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS WORKSHOP

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The 6th Provincial Environmental Awareness Workshop was held at Faafu Atoll Education Center (FAEC), F. Nilandhoo from 29 – 30 April 2011.



The workshop, the sixth of a series of environmental awareness-raising workshops conducted nationwide by Environment Department since 2010, was completed as a two day program. A session to give information to the students concerning major environmental issues was held on 29th April (Friday) and a beach cleanup program involving a waste survey was conducted on 30th April (Saturday).

96 students from FAEC participated in the workshop. The topics covered in Friday's session included environmental health, climate change and energy, energy saving facts, waste management and environmental issues at island level.

Apart from the presentations, various interactive activities were conducted and environmental video clips were screened.

At the end of the session certificates were awarded to all the students who took part in the workshop. The certificates were distributed by Mr. Abdul Jaleel Ahmed, President of the Island Council. In addition to certificates, and number of publications by Environment Department awareness raising materials were donated to the libraries of the school.

AIR POLLUTION

Mohamed Simah



Air pollution is a broad term applied to any chemical, physical (particulate matter), or biological agent that modifies the natural characteristics of the atmosphere.

The atmosphere is a complex, dynamic natural gaseous system that is essential to support life on planet earth.

Stratospheric ozone depletion due to air pollution has long been recognized as a threat to human health as well as to the earth's ecosystems. Worldwide air pollution is responsible for large numbers of deaths and cases of respiratory disease.

While major stationary sources are often identified with air pollution, the greatest sources of emissions are actually mobile sources, principally the automobile.

There are many available air pollution control technologies and urban planning strategies available to reduce air pollution; however, worldwide costs of addressing the issue are high.

The most immediate method of improving air quality would be the use of bioethanol fuel, biodiesel, solar energy, and hybrid vehicle technologies.

The World Health Organization estimates that 4.6 million people die each year from causes directly attributable to air pollution.

Many of these mortalities are attributable to indoor air pollution.

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Worldwide more deaths per year are linked to air pollution than to automobile accidents.

Research published in 2005 suggests that 310,000 Europeans die from air pollution annually.

Direct causes of air pollution related deaths include aggravated asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, lung and heart diseases, and respiratory allergies.

Source: http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/a/air_pollution.htm

MEMP HANDS OVER LAB EQUIPMENTS AND BOOKS FOR ACADEMIC COURSE AT MNU

Laboratory equipments and books worth Mrf550,000 have been handed over to Faculty of Education of The Maldives National University (MNU) on the 28th of June 2011 in support of the implementation of Diploma/Degree in Environmental Management by MEMP. It is expected that MEMP will provide Mrf 14 million worth of assistance to establish this program at the Faculty of Education. In addition to this a further Mrf 8 million will be spent on training 6 lecturers in Australia. The course is a joint initiative by MNU and the Ministry of Housing and Environment and aims to meet the Maldives' future need for skilled professionals in the area of environmental management.

The writing of the course curriculum was carried out by a Professor of Sustainability from Australia and the structure has been designed to ensure international equivalency. During the course curriculum development phase, extensive discussions were held with local experts to identify and include appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes required to ensure local relevance.

The course is designed to allow a number of exit points by incorporating a Diploma (1 year full time study), an Advanced Diploma (2 years full time study) and a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Management (3 years full time study). Candidates for admission who lack "A-Level" or equivalent qualifications will be given an additional year of Foundation Studies in specified core subjects. Students who enroll in the Diploma/

Degree will be provided full scholarships by MEMP during the life of the project.

Consultations held with key stakeholders of the project reveal that exceptional job opportunities will be available in the future job market for the graduates from this course.

5 STRANGEST TREES ON EARTH

Trees are important components of the natural landscape and a wonderful living organism which gives shelter, food, warmth and protection to all living things. Though common trees are fascinating immensely but there are some of the more unusual and amazing tree specimens found in the world which is weird and spectacular, yet people are hardly aware of their mysterious properties, strange sizes or unusual shapes. Here are some which top the list of being the strangest trees found on the planet. It's a treat to the eye!

AXEL ERLANDSON'S CIRCUS TREE

Axel Erlandson's passion for sculpting trees, also known as arborsculpture, led him to open a horticulture attraction in 1947 near Santa Cruz, California named The Circus Tree and people flocked in from all over the country to view his strange and striking creations which are nothing short of breathtaking! Using a special set of skills, Erlandson started to sculpt things out of living, growing trees. One such tree is the famous "Basket Tree". Which is actually six Sycamores grafted together in 42 different connections to give it its basket shape.



PIRANGI CASHEW TREE, BRAZIL



It's the largest cashew tree in the world and more like a root and bush than a tree covering a span of 8,500 square meters alone! This tree is probably 300 feet by 300 feet in total. It looks like a forest and bears 8000 fruit in a year. This picture doesn't do it justice but should give you an idea of the enormity.

BAOBAB – MADAGASCAR



Baobabs, with their distinctive shape, are one of the most charismatic groups of trees in the world. This particular specimen, located in Madagascar, is referred to as the 'Teapot Baobab'. These trees remain leafless for most part of the year, and their thick, bloated, fire-resistant trunks store water during the dry months. One would be surprised to find that some baobab trunks are so large that people actually reside inside them!

GERMAN SHERMAN – (SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK)

General Sherman is about 2500 years old tree with a height of 275 feet (83.8 metres), located in the Giant Forest of Sequoia National Park in the United States. In January 2006 the largest branch on the tree broke off. The breakage, however, could not change the General Sherman's status as the largest tree! This stunning tree has the base of its trunk measuring about 102 feet in circumference. Witnesses to this spectacular creation of

nature can only justify its stature!



SILK COTTON TREES OF TA PROHM, CAMBODIA

Ta Prohm Temple or the Jungle Temple which is located in the Angkor Thom complex has trees growing here in the most astounding way. Words cannot describe it until you set foot there and see it for yourself. Apparently, the place was left as is over the hundreds of years and the outcome is amazing from what you see now in the place which is also called Angkor Archaeological Park. On every side, in fantastic over-scale, the trunks of the silk-cotton trees soar skywards under a shadowy green canopy, their long spreading skirts trailing the ground and their endless roots coiling more like reptiles than plants.



Source: <http://pictovista.blogspot.com/2011/05/10-weirdest-trees-on-earth.html>

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Environment Department,
Ministry of Housing and Environment,
1st Floor, Tinu Building, Ameenee Magu,
Male', Republic of Maldives.
Email: ahmed.hassaan@mhe.gov.mv
Web: <http://pemphis.wordpress.com>
<http://www.mhe.gov.mv>