

Is Sg Dua water treatment plant dumping hazardous waste into Sg Prai?

Environmental group thinks so as it is operating without sludge lagoon, but Penang Water Supply Corp denies claim

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Media representatives observe the water drained from the Sg Dua water treatment plant, which produces mud water and alum sludge, that flows into Sg Prai during a site survey. – The Vibes file pic, May 7, 2021

BUTTERWORTH – The Penang Sustainable Natural Heritage Association (Lekas) has alleged that the Sg Dua water treatment plant – the largest and most important water treatment plant in Penang – is dumping water treatment waste containing aluminum (alum sludge) into Sg Prai.

Lekas chairman Zikrullah Ismail, during a site survey with the media today, said he received a report that the Sg Dua plant is operating without a sludge lagoon, thus dumping sludge directly into Sg Prai.

He said alum sludge, which is a water treatment plant process by-product, is categorised as hazardous waste, or Scheduled Wastes SW204, according to the Environmental Quality Act 1974.

“This action is not in line with the commitment of ISO 14001: 2015 Environmental Policy obtained by the Penang Water Supply Corporation.

“Lekas urges immediate action by the state government to coordinate all relevant agencies to ensure pollution can be addressed for the well-being of the people and environment.”

During the survey, media representatives were taken to see the water drained from the Sg Dua plant, which produces mud water and alum sludge, that continues to flow into Sg Prai, with an estimated distance of 1.6km.

Residents claimed that the heavy metal has caused the surrounding area to experience frequent flash floods, and threatens the extinction of marine life, such as lobsters, in Sg Prai.

However, the water supply services, in its counter statement, has denied allegations that the Sg Dua plant is dumping water treatment waste containing metal substances, thus affecting Sg Prai.

Its chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said the water treatment waste dumped from the plant into the Sg Prai basin is harmless to humans and the aquatic environment.

The main content of waste water is aluminum, which results from the use of aluminum sulfate, or polyaluminium chloride, for conventional water treatment's freezing process, he added.

"The Sg Dua plant is not the only water treatment plant in Malaysia that dumps waste water into the river.

"The National Water Services Commission estimates that water treatment plants in the country produce 5,500 tonnes of waste water per day.

"Results of tests and findings from studies conducted on waste water found that the outcome is not dangerous.

"This situation is happening not only in Malaysia, but also worldwide, where this fact is supported by several other countries."

Jaseni said the Sg Dua plant has been in operation since 1973, and during those 48 years, no incident of water pollution due to waste water disposal in Sg Prai has been reported.

However, he added that Penang Water Supply Corporation will work closely with the Environment and Water Ministry, Environment Department and National Water Services Commission to handle waste water to ensure the sustainability of Sg Prai. – The Vibes,