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S'pore's green efforts get mixed report card

Feng Zengkun and Audrey Tan
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SINGAPORE received a mixed report card for its environmental efforts yesterday, even as global citizens marked the United Nations' World Environment Day.

While the Republic has made strides in protecting marine plants and animals, and in getting people to use less water and electricity, it still has some way to go in recycling and in getting people to throw away fewer gadgets and household appliances.

That was the view of experts at the Eco Action Day panel discussion yesterday. They also called for more organisations here to switch to buying greener products, for example, when sourcing office supplies.

The forum was organised by Ricoh Asia Pacific and website Eco-Business, with other partners such as the National Environment Agency (NEA), Singapore Environment Council (SEC) and Singapore Business Federation.

NEA chief executive Ronnie Tay, who was among the panellists yesterday, said Singapore has to minimise its use of natural resources and reduce waste and pollutant emissions for the sake of future generations.

"Considering our resource constraints, improving sustainability even as we grow economically is very important. Our efforts have paid off to a large extent, since Singapore is one of Asia's most globalised, investor-friendly and green cities," he said.

Eco-Business editor Jessica Cheam pointed out that Singapore had stepped up its green efforts in recent years.

"The government has come up with policies that tackle heavier issues such as recycling, energy efficiency and the green economy. The Sustainable Singapore Blueprint 2015 in particular has outlined the effort, and our aspirations to become a car-light, zero-waste nation are all very good ideals," she said.

However, she noted, there is still no legislation on electronic waste or household recycling.

"It is high time we did that, instead of waiting for multi-sector collaborations and people to become aware," she said. "Without government efforts to legislate, the progress will be very slow."

SEC executive director Edwin Seah said he, too, would like to see greater commitment by organisations and individuals to buying products from sustainable sources.

"The Government can come up with platforms and infrastructure, but the individual consumer must also want to take action," he said.

Ms Ria Tan, who runs website wildsingapore.com, told The Straits Times that more Singaporeans became aware of environmental issues after the 2013 haze crisis, and they are working more closely to tackle the problems.

"An example is the Ubin Project, which brought people together to work on the complex issues affecting Singapore's last unspoilt island," she said.

The ongoing project, by the Ministry of National Development, aims to maintain the island's rustic charm.