

NEA project nips littering in the bud

By DAVID LIM

A PILOT programme introduced to nine schools in May to teach students to take ownership of the cleanliness of their schools and public areas will now be extended to a further 26 schools, Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources Amy Khor said yesterday.

She was speaking to students and teachers from 230 schools at the eighth Clean and Green Schools Carnival held at Anchor Green Primary School in Sengkang.

Launched by the National Environment Agency (NEA), the Students Embrace Litter-Free (Self) Programme aims to reduce the number of young people caught littering.

"We are starting this at the school level because we believe that we need to inculcate such habits from young, so that students will internalise them and they'll become second nature," said Dr Khor.

Last year, NEA caught 4,278

people aged below 21 for littering, up from 1,835 in 2006.

On average, 2,098 people below 21 were caught each year in the past decade, up from 1,384 people a year during the 1990s.

Students involved in the programme will take part in at least two clean-up activities a year, or once every semester, at public places such as parks and stadiums.

They will carry out one clean-up session at a beach and ensure that the areas around their schools are kept clean.

These areas include public walkways, parks and bus stops.

The programme will also provide ways for students to go on "litter patrols", pick up litter and report lapses in cleanliness to the authorities.

NEA said the pupils at Anchor Green Primary School, one of those involved in the pilot programme, have learnt that clearing litter is a difficult task and that they need to take responsibility for their neighbourhoods' cleanliness.

Madam Low Ai Choo, 37, a

teacher at the school, said: "Sometimes, the pupils are not aware that littering is wrong, because their parents or adults do it.

"Through this programme, they will hopefully realise that littering is wrong, even if they are dropping just a small piece of tissue paper."

Joey Er Jia Ann, 10, a Primary 4 pupil at Anchor Green, said she initially found picking up litter to be "disgusting".

Through the programme, she has learnt that it is important to keep the environment clean.

The experience has also helped some pupils empathise with the plight of cleaners.

"It was not easy picking up litter in public areas. Some cleaners are old and it's very hard for them to bend down and pick up litter," said Primary 6 pupil Natanael Wijaya, 12, from Princess Elizabeth Primary School, another of the schools participating in the pilot programme.

NEA hopes to have 50 per cent of Singapore's 354 schools involved in Self by 2012.

limhw@sph.com.sg