

Dear National Climate Change Secretariat,

I am a teacher in a Junior College in Singapore. At a recent examination, more than half the students in the hall were wearing sweaters. It is crazy if you think about it: we are in the tropics and people have to wear sweaters to stay warm.

The Singapore government should mandate that temperatures in shopping malls, office buildings and schools (and everywhere else, as much as legally possible) should be at least 25 degrees Celsius. For comparison, Japan has decreed that all government agencies set their air-conditioners to no colder than 28 degrees Celsius during summer. Singapore's building code should also mandate – not just suggest or encourage – building designs that do not need to be cooled much in the first place.

There should also be a stop to the rampant use of single-use plastic in Singapore. The amount of plastic that is being used is shocking, in particular when compared to Europe or even Mumbai. Plastic is everywhere and people are almost shocked when you do not want a plastic bag with your newly bought pen or chocolate bar.

It has been suggested many times that supermarkets should no longer give out plastic bags. One of the arguments against this is that people “need” the plastic bags to line their dust bins. However, I have seen customers at supermarkets receive more than 20 free plastic bags; I doubt they have that many bins to line at home. Singapore should ban single-use plastic or at least introduce a plastic-bag free of five or ten cents to make people more conscious about their use of plastic. Other single-use items like plastics straws, coffee cups and cutlery have to be banned completely.

Singapore should also fight plastic proliferation through more education. Most people have no idea that polyester is plastic, or that the production of polyester uses harmful chemicals, including carcinogens, and causes significant environmental damage. Better education would make the public more conscious about its consumerism.

Yours sincerely,
Dave Lommen

Dear National Climate Change Secretariat,

To address the climate crisis, Singapore will have to embrace electric mobility. It is incredible that our amazing public-transport systems is anchored in fossil-fuel-powered buses, which are polluting the air together with diesel-powered trucks and petrol-guzzling cars.

As Singapore is still trialling diesel-electric hybrid and battery-powered public buses, it is lagging by decades compared to other countries. In China, it took Shenzhen less than five years to turn all of its 16 000 buses and 20 000 taxis to electric ones. Singapore is richer and has less vehicles to convert, so it should be able to do better. One argument that has been brought up against this is that the electricity is still coming from fossil fuels. However, this should not be a deterrent, but rather a motivator: according to the IPCC, the renewable share in electricity should be at least 25% in 2030 and at least 63% in 2050.

Besides electrifying the public-transport fleet, a wider use of personal mobility devices, or PMDs, would actually lead to a vast decrease in the demand for energy. The amount of energy required to bring a person from A to B with a PMD is about ten times as low as that required to do the same with a car, even when carpooling is considered. This more than compensates for the extra conversion of fossil fuels to electricity, before it is used to power the PMD.

Clean mobility in Singapore would also be vastly improved with the introduction of bicycle lanes everywhere. Even though the total number of cars in Singapore is being capped, the country is still broadening roads and adding lanes on a large scale, so that more cars can be on the road at the same time. Rather, the number of lanes for cars should be reduced, to discourage people from driving. Instead, lanes should be reserved for pedestrians, cyclists and PMD users. This will encourage commuters to choose less polluting means of transport. Currently, people are unwilling, because of safety and air pollution.

The advantages of bicycles and PMDs do not stop there. PMDs and bicycles, including electronic ones, cost less to buy and maintain than cars. They also require fewer resources, which is in line with Singapore's move towards a zero-waste economy. To top it off, they cost a lot less infrastructure. Think of all the parking lots for cars in Singapore, useless space that should be used so much more intelligently, for instance to increase the area used for solar power.

Note that encouraging people to sell their own cars and use car-sharing apps or taxis is not a solution to address climate change. So-called "shared" cars will have to drive extra to fetch people from where they are, while a lot of taxis are driving around aimlessly in the hope of being hailed, even in the middle of the night. As such, even driving your own car is considerably less bad for the environment and the climate than using car-sharing apps or taxis.

Yours sincerely,
Dave Lommen

Dear NCCS,

In your request for feedback, you ask me what it requires for me to recycle. I already recycle whatever I can. However, it is sometimes not possible to recycle. Examples include mixed items (e.g., metal and plastic, or plastic and paper), or materials that cannot be recycled (e.g., chips bags, or Styrofoam boxes). It is up to the Government to make sure that all materials can be recycled. Hence, mixed materials and materials that cannot be recycled must be outlawed.

Even for materials that can be recycled, it is not often clear that it is the case. In other countries, packaging has to be classified (e.g., which part can be recycled as paper, which part can be recycled as plastic). Singapore should make it mandatory for all materials to be clearly classified. At the moment, some types of plastic can be recycled, while other types cannot. Sometimes, packaging contains a logo that indicates what type of plastic it is. However, most people do not know what those different types are, let alone which types can be recycled. This should be made clear to all, on every piece of packaging.

The Government needs to step up its efforts in terms of education. Most Singaporeans can quote Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. However, a lot of people have no idea on how to Recycle Right. For example, it is not uncommon for food waste to end up in recycling bins. Thus, the goals of the recycling-education campaigns have not been met.

In a lot of countries, plastic and glass bottles can be returned to shops, where people get money back when they hand in their bottles. This should be introduced in Singapore as well.

Yours sincerely,
Dave Lommen