

Recycle factory owner believes 95% of waste in Kuwait can be recycled

'Recycle Kuwait' takes recyclable material from 100+ homes

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Recycling is not very popular in Kuwait, but there are people who believe it is important to preserve our environment. Shakir Al-Essa has been working in this field since 2007. He first worked in a company that ran a factory recycling metal, and another that recycled plastic. But the company closed down, as it couldn't sustain its operations. "I worked at that company for about 11 years. In 2007, I started a project of collecting recyclable household and office waste, such as paper, plastic and metal. Later, about six or seven years, other companies were founded, but each of them only focused on one material. With time, all these companies shut down, and the last of them was the one I worked for, in 2013," he told Kuwait Times.



Shakir Al-Essa

"Customers were calling me regarding the project that we stopped, as it was not profitable. The company operated for about six years with total loss, and one of the main reasons for its losses was that it was collecting the waste for free from houses. At that time, the price of metals was high, but after the financial crisis in 2008, the government issued decisions banning exporting metals abroad, except under certain strict conditions. This made the price of metal drop, and the ministry of commerce froze prices," Essa explained.

"For instance, in the past if an old refrigerator was placed in the street, it would immediately disappear, while today, nobody wants it. In the past, prices were about five times higher than today. This has also reduced the theft of manhole covers, as they're not worth anything anymore, and will only fetch KD 2 today," he said.

completely disappearing. The government's proposal of realizing a public-private partnership (PPP) project for producing energy from recycled waste is yet to be realized. But this will kill the business of recycling factories that run on this waste as their only source," warned Essa.

The recycle process goes through multiple stages. "Some companies sift out materials from the waste collected by the municipality and deliver it to the recycling factory. We are all part of the process. The consumer can also separate waste, and the company will take and clean it, then deliver it to the recycling factory. Without the middlemen, this process will not be complete," highlighted Essa.

Various obstacles

Some kinds of waste need to be in a certain quantity to be recycled. "The population of Kuwait is very small to have a factory for recycling electronics. We can't be sure that the costly factory will collect enough electronic waste for the recycling process. Also, recycling factories fear new regulations that could limit their business, such as the regulation on banning the export of metals," he said.

Ninety percent of the resources of recycling factories come from landfills. "If the project for using waste for generating electricity is realized, factories and companies working in this industry will lose their resources and shut down. This project was proposed in the past and wasn't realized, but recently, the government proposed it again. It's a one-billion-dinar project. I don't think it's a great project, as plastic recycling will be most affected," Essa said.

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Long cycle

According to him, the recycling process is a long cycle that starts from the consumer and ends with him again using the recycled object. "If somebody has an old glass cup and doesn't want it, he can give it away for recycling, and after it is recycled, another person will buy it. This is if we have a factory for recycling this material, otherwise it will be exported," Essa stated.

In a small country like Kuwait, there aren't factories for recycling all kinds of materials. "When the companies were operating, there were various buyers inside and outside Kuwait, which encouraged competition. But the Ministry of Commerce later issued a regulation banning the export of metals, so two local factories fixed prices, which were high and not profitable. So it's not a good business for companies to work in," he pointed out.

Kuwait is not an attractive environment for investments in recycling. "This industry is facing a danger of

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'Recycle Kuwait'

Essa is currently the general manager of Safya International Import and Export Company and is working on 'Recycle Kuwait' - a project that was launched a year ago. "Over 100 clients deal with this project, who pay KD 80 annually for the company to take recyclable material from their homes. This waste includes metal products such as microwave ovens and refrigerators, paper, plastic, glass and used frying oil. I pick this waste weekly," he noted.

This shows that awareness is rising in the society. "People are now more aware of environmental problems, and the increasing number of diseases that spread in the community. They know that our lifestyle is not healthy, including our food. These clients are thoughtful people, and they usually eat organic food, practice sports and strive to improve the environment," noted Essa.

"In my opinion, there shouldn't be landfills, and 95 percent of waste should be recycled. Even food can be converted into organic fertilizer that can be used for agriculture, instead of wasting money on transporting it with all the foul smell. There are special machines for this type of recycling, which convert it immediately. And if people don't want to buy it, they can recycle it themselves, but this will take about a month. This organic fertilizer is liquid and can be used to improve agriculture or can be mixed with sewage to clean it. As there is no law regulating the recycling process, people are not obliged to use such machines, which if used will save both the public budget spent on waste and the environment as well," he added.

Waste is mainly of three categories: Recyclable, non-recyclable, and hazardous, out of which recyclable waste forms the majority. "We may have concerns about what to do with expired drugs, but we are now working on this issue to find a solution. Hazardous waste includes lamps and batteries, as these contain dangerous materials. We need to treat it and not bury it. Currently, we only collect recyclable waste, but we aim to become a solution provider for the rest of the waste in the future," concluded Essa.

Banning exporting metal abroad made the price of metal drop



Labels distributed by 'Recycle Kuwait' project workers to be placed on recyclable material.



Waste collected by Safya International Import and Export Company for recycling.

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