Managing solid waste in the University of Peradeniya: successes and failures of strategies

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Solid Waste Management (SWM) refers to the supervising and handling of SW from its generation to disposal. While many developed countries manage their solid waste using several strategies, most developing countries still suffer from this problem since there is no proper system to manage it. In Sri Lanka, due to the lack of systematic mechanisms for managing solid waste, it has become one of the serious national problems of the country. Today the situation has become worse with the problem spreading beyond the main urban areas of the country to semi-urban areas and places where people are concentrated such as educational institutions and health facilities. It is a threat to both physical and social environment, leading to many health and social problem as well. This paper examines the problem of solid waste in the University of Peradeniya. There are two objectives to this study: to examine the strategies that the university is implementing to manage its solid waste problem and to evaluate successes and failures of such strategies from the point of view of the university community and relevant implementing bodies. The study covered a sample of 50 households (University quarters) selected through simple random sampling method. Further, data was collected from students and wardens of two student's hostels (male and female) and employers of one administrative block. The study primarily used qualitative data collection techniques such as interviews, discussion and researcher observation. In addition, to support the primary data, secondary data was collected from existing reports using desk survey. The study revealed that though the majority of the university community is generally happy about the new waste management system, cooperation extended by the members of the university community is poor and is the main reason for the shortcomings experienced. Separation of waste at the generating points is not satisfactory in all the areas. Further, the system that is being implemented is not well coordinated. Less awareness of the solid waste problem among the university community and the lack of infrastructure facilities are also reasons for such failures. Waste collection is regular and the community is generally satisfied with the collection timetable.