

For Immediate Release



AUB responds to waste crisis

Workshop to exchange knowledge with municipalities and NGOs

Beirut, Lebanon- 06/08/2015 - Confronted with a combustible waste crisis that mainly affected Beirut and Mount Lebanon, AUB faculty members took the lead by forming a taskforce whose aim is to share scientific knowledge among municipalities and NGOs in the hopes that they would be empowered to find optimal solutions to the ongoing crisis.

In response to a call launched last week by Dr. Najat Saliba, chemistry professor, AUB professors from all faculties quickly mobilized and met on a regular basis, creating working groups that could address the problem, from its public health, environmental health, and waste management aspects.

“The current waste crisis has compelled each one of us to try and find a solution,” said Saliba. “As faculty, we could help by sharing knowledge and building a network among NGOs, municipalities and experts, so that together we could propose evidence-based and effective solutions, as well as propose measures to minimize any negative health impacts.”

On Thursday, August 6, the AUB taskforce organized a half-day workshop, attended by at least 29 municipalities from all over Lebanon, as well as environmental activists and NGOs.

“The positive aspect of this waste crisis is that it has the potential to create a real, independent public opinion, for the first time in Lebanon,” said Dr. Tarek Mitri, director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB.

AUB experts from the AUB Medical Center shared good practices that would help reduce the spread of disease, whenever garbage is accumulating in the streets and not being collected.

Drs. Nesrine Rizk and Hiba El-Hajj overviewed the kind of health problems that could arise from the multiplication of viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites as a result of uncollected waste, warning that animals, insects and rodents are high-risk agents for spreading health problems.

Simple measures that would help protect both children and adults from developing health problems involve proper washing of hands before handling food, avoiding raw meats, staying indoors and away from garbage, using mosquito nets on windows and over beds, and using anti-mosquito sprays.

“We warn against burning garbage because it often contains, plastics, pesticides, deodorants, and other chemicals, that when burned emit hazardous toxins in the air,” said Dr. Rizk.

Meanwhile Dr. Salma Talhouk from the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences promoted the use of earthworms among villagers and urban dwellers to degrade organic waste, especially vegetarian waste, in a clean, cheap and effective manner, resulting in high-quality organic fertilizers.

Faculty of Health Sciences Associate Professor May Massoud highlighted the importance of reducing, reusing, and recycling waste in order to extend the life of a landfill, in a country that has a shortage of land and whose residents would not accept a landfill in their backyards.

AUB faculty members recommended against spraying garbage mounds with toxic pesticides and that the prevalent white calcium carbonate is enough to ward off insects until the waste is collected. However, they told municipal leaders that could control flying insect populations by spraying specific types of safe insecticides only near water sources and in moist areas or marshes.

The Sidon municipality along with the waste management plant that handles its waste presented their experience regarding sorting and treating the 250 tons of waste that arise from Sidon and its environs, including 16 municipalities. The result is a small percentage of refuse left over, but a significant amount of electricity and organic fertilizer is produced. Sidon used to throw its waste in a smelly and badly managed dump, which was shut down a few years ago, and turned into a garden, according to Mayor Mohamad Saudi.

Finally, environmentalists called on every single person to assume responsibility of their waste, first by reducing it and then by sorting it in the household into a blue bag for recyclables and a black bag for all organic waste, mixed with a small amount of napkins or newspapers to absorb the fermented juices that are often produced by household waste, knowing that at least 60 percent of Lebanese waste is organic.

“Our garbage is very easy to deal with and is not suitable for burning since it’s very moist due to its high organic composition,” said Ziad Abi Chaker, head of Cedar Environmental and an environmental engineer who has been working with waste for a quarter century.

Abi-Chaker added that NGOs were working to locate drop-off points where people could leave their blue bags filled with recyclables.

[Fliers](#) listing the names and phone numbers of NGOs collecting recyclables were distributed.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor’s, master’s, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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