

Climate change is here and now, says Desmond Lee; this is how Singapore is fighting back



National Development Minister Desmond Lee speaking at the Ecosperity Week conference on June 7.
ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

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SINGAPORE - The impact of climate change is here and now, with Singapore already experiencing [the hottest day in 40 years on May 13](#) when the mercury hit 37 deg C, while 2022 was one of the wettest years since 1980.

While the science of climate change may still be evolving and people continue to learn about the full extent of its effects, we must take action now, said National Development Minister Desmond Lee on Wednesday, as he outlined what the country is doing to decarbonise as well as fortify its defences against climate change impacts.

He said more than 20 per cent of Singapore's carbon emissions come from buildings and some of the ways to cut emissions there is to harness electricity from green energy sources and build sustainable towns, districts and buildings.

"It is therefore absolutely critical for us to find innovative ways to flatten the emissions curve brought about by urbanisation," Mr Lee said, on the second day of the Ecosperity Week conference at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

He cited the [Singapore Green Building Masterplan](#), which charts out the aim of greening 80 per cent of buildings by gross floor area and ensuring that 80 per cent of new buildings will be classified as super-low energy by 2030.

The third target is to allow for the best-in-class green buildings to have an 80 per cent improvement in energy efficiency by 2030, compared with the standards in 2005, with the help of research and innovation.

In mid-2022, the [Green Mark Incentive Scheme](#) was launched to help building owners tap grants to retrofit their buildings and make them more energy-efficient.

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Despite the 2030 targets, a report released in April by Schneider Electric and the Singapore Green Building Council said three in five companies here are not familiar with the concept of green buildings.

Singapore aims to [reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050](#) and a key driver of that will be greening energy sources by harnessing solar power, regional power grids and hydrogen fuel, said Mr Lee.

According to [a report on South-east Asia's green economy](#) released on Tuesday, there are significant challenges related to the higher capital costs of making green investments, especially in renewables, due to the concern about insufficient returns.

Mr Lee highlighted how new neighbourhoods such as Jurong Lake District are planned with sustainability as a priority.

Touted as Singapore's second central business district, [Jurong Lake District](#) will be car-lite and served by [a centralised district cooling network](#) that uses less energy for the same amount of cooling.

Recently, a Jurong Lake District innovation challenge was launched to get companies and research institutes to come up with solutions to address issues related to reducing emissions and energy usage, managing waste and realising the car-lite vision.



Some of the ways to cut emissions is to harness electricity from green energy sources. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

But these innovations cannot progress and scale up unless building developers, facilities managers, infrastructure agencies and customers buy in to the ideas and facilitate them, said Mr Lee, during a chat with planning and design firm Arup's cities business leader for South-east Asia, Mr Chintan Raveshia.

While much has been discussed about greening the urban environment, the minister added that the blue spaces – the marine environment and seas – must not be forgotten.

“Unlike land, a lot of blue spaces are global commons. They have the potential to sequester so much carbon. On the other hand, if you exploit them relentlessly, they will be emitters. They are a tremendous supply of food... A lot of solutions can be found by harnessing the energy of the high seas and oceans, if you do so sensitively,” he said.

Discussion Questions

Who are the relevant stakeholders in our climate crisis and why is it important that they work together against climate change?

What are some other technological innovations that have decreased urban emissions?