YOUNG AND RESTLESS

Spread the word: It's hip to be green

By Alexis Hooi

THEY are young, they are hip - and best of all, they are green.

There is already a small group of young Singaporeans who are passionate about environmental issues such as climate change, nature conservation and sustainability.

Now Environment and Water Resources Minister Yaacob Ibrahim wants them to spread the word to others, starting with their peers.

'I want to get the message out to the masses and make it fashionable, to make the environment something Singaporeans can see - and I think your generation can do it better than mine,' said Dr Yaacob.

He posed the challenge to about 30 young Singaporeans, university students and young professionals, in the first of a series of dialogues to bring green issues closer to home.

Last month's two-hour session kicked off with three questions: What else Singaporeans can do about global warming, how to improve existing environmental programmes and how Singapore can become a more carbon-conscious society. But it soon took on a variety of issues.

Primary school teacher Mindy Neo, 25, for instance, felt that there was a general lack of awareness here about green issues. And it could be emphasised more in schools.

'In terms of resources, more slides and teaching materials could be used for teaching environmental topics. We need to show... we're concerned about such things,' she said.

Miss Dionne Teo, 24, a member of marine conservation group Blue Water Volunteers, said that families in the heartlands must be reached for any programme such as recycling or waste reduction to be effective.

'Most people don't really understand the need or see the point. We need to localise the effects through more ads or with ambassadors carrying the message,' she said.

Dr Yaacob said such outreach programmes still needed on-the-ground work: 'Our challenge is to find some creative ways to get the average Singaporean interested.'
Engineer Jasmine Teo, 26, saw a partnership between industry and the Government as one way to raise workers' environmental consciousness, with management taking a lead role.

She said her semiconductor company frequently organised trips for employees, such as visits to nature areas like Sungei Buloh. 'It helps once they know what saving the environment is all about,' she added.

But Dr Yaacob believes the answer still lies with the younger generation: 'Yes, the Government should be taking the lead, but I want to get the young interested,' he said.

He proposed getting tertiary students, like members of Nanyang Technological University's green club Earthlink NTU, to aggressively run programmes to create awareness within their college community.

'Young people will listen only to young people,' he said.