DENR-NCR promotes proper disposal of face masks, other household medical wastes

By Ma. Alaine P. Allanigue Published on September 8, 2020

QUEZON CITY, Sept. 8 (PIA) -- The Department of Environment and Natural Resources - National Capital Region (DENR-NCR) is promoting the proper disposal of face masks and other household medical wastes after an alarming reports that discarded face masks have reached the shores of Manila Bay.

Regional Executive Director Jacqueline A. Caancan said “we could have a problem much graver than the amount of fecal coliform found in its waters if we do not act with haste”.

Recently, the DENR-NCR and the Rotary Club of Makati Rockwell (RCMR) inked an agreement on the conduct of a communication campaign on the proper disposal of used face masks and other household medical wastes.

Caancan signed the MOA on behalf of the DENR National Capital Region while Ms. Stella Marie B. Ignacio, current president of RCMR, represented the club.
DENR National Capital Region Assistant Regional Director for Management Services Dr. Al O. Orolfo and RCMR Secretary Kristina G. Dancel, stood as witnesses.

Caancan, in her message, noted how timely the partnership with RCMR is, especially as medical wastes, from both hospitals, households, and other institutions, have been on the rise since the pandemic started early this year.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), for example, estimated an increase of 280 metric tons of medical waste per day for hospitals in Metro Manila, up from the average of 47 metric tons before the pandemic began.

This figure, however, only accounts for medical waste generated by hospitals; it does not include medical waste generated from households and other new players, like the quarantine facilities and hotels converted into a temporary shelter for suspected COVID-19 cases or Locally Stranded Individuals (LSIs).

Caancan said, all of these new sources of medical wastes adds a burden to the overloaded waste disposal system.

“We need to inform and educate the public on the dangers of improperly disposed facemasks and PPEs, not only to public health but the health of the environment too,” Caancan said.

“First off, we need to put our used facemasks, gloves, and PPEs in a separate container. We should avoid mixing it with our regular household wastes,” Caancan explained.

“Secondly, we must ensure that the garbage bag containing our used PPEs is sealed and properly labeled before handing it out to our garbage collectors just so they know that it must be handled with caution,” she added.

Caancan stressed that while there is a need to protect ourselves by using facemasks and gloves, there is also a need to protect the people around us.

“There is no use protecting ourselves if the people around us keep getting sick because we have been careless in the disposal of our used face masks,” she said. “We must also realize that the state of our health is inextricably linked with the state of our environment. What happens to our environment, necessarily affects us and vice-versa,” she added.

According to Caancan, one way of reducing the amount of medical waste is to use reusable facemasks and gloves instead.
“If DENR and RCMR can successfully convince the public in doing so, limiting the use of medical-grade face masks to hospital workers and the like, we would be making a great contribution in our fight to beat COVID-19 while protecting the environment,” she ended. (DENR-NCR/PIA-NCR)

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