

# Toward a zero-waste society

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Marilao River in Bulacan is now a highway of garbage. I looked hard for some water somewhere, but the video footage from a recent news report on evening TV showed only garbage!

Five years ago in a waste management orientation we conducted for the Marilao local government, the blame was put on the adjacent Baranugay Bagong Silang in Caloocan City for the mess that has gotten much worse. Bagong Silang is the country's largest and most populous barangay. The news report said some Marilao residents were also dumping their garbage in the river, which connects and carries the garbage to the Meycauayan and Obando rivers and Manila Bay. In my youth, in Obando, we feasted on varied, delicious seafood from the river. It also provided residents with livelihood. If you can find an oyster there now, give it to your enemy; it is toxic, deadly.

A recent letter writer to the Opinion Section of this paper complained about the garbage load of Estero Tripa de Galina bordering the boundary of the Makati/Pasay cities. A creek beside Road 6 in Barangay Silangan, Quezon City, also reeks of garbage, including the waste from a piggery alongside it.

The website of the National Solid Waste Management Commission of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources lists 364 open and 217 controlled dumpsites all over the country. Republic Act No. 9003 (or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000) mandates that open and controlled dumps should have been closed in 2004 and 2006 and replaced by "sanitary landfills," but only for residual wastes after segregation at source: Biodegradable wastes must be composted, and nonbiodegradable wastes, re-used, sold, and recycled (Section 32). The landfill should be designed for only five years of use "during which people must internalize the value of environmentally sound and sustainable waste disposal" (Sec. 40- f).

Civil society groups and the Office of the Ombudsman have joined hands to address the dumpsite problem, including landfills or glorified dumps that are mostly in watershed areas. Cases have been filed against some local government officials violating RA 9003. Compliance to RA 9003 is the order of the day.

In November 2016, a jeepney driver told me: "While plying my route, I saw a man in a big motorbike drive into [a] city hall and park in front. Many people had gathered and I became curious. It was President Duterte! He ordered the security guards to call the mayor who came out trembling. Duterte was so mad about the dirty streets, garbage all around the city...."

News reports, social media, and some friends belied the driver's story, though a number of them heard about it. There must be fire where there is smoke, because just before the story made the rounds, the President in one of his statements had criticized the litter and garbage in Metro Manila, which was in such contrast with the cleanliness of Davao City.

Ecological solid waste management should start in the households and establishments where waste is generated, with the help of the barangay (RA 9003, Sec. 21,22,30), using local resources or simple, low-cost technologies (Sec. 2- b,c,d), and employing more labor.

Waste-to-energy technology, aka incineration or burning, is aggressively and deceptively being marketed on the claim that it is much improved from the failed and dangerous technology that it still is. Even if there may be no more emissions (to the naked eye, that is), more fly ash and bottom ash are retained. This is much more deadly, the experts say, but national and local government authorities refuse to listen. Countries burdened by the ill effects and high-maintenance costs of incineration are phasing it out. Our country bans this technology (RA 9003, Sec. 2-d, and RA 8749 or the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999). The irony of it!

More heads can think and more hands can work to segregate waste at source, compost biodegradable waste, and re-use, recycle, or sell nonbiodegradable waste. These are simple acts of caring for our common home, in our households and backyards. We just need to love our country more to make it a zero-waste society.

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