

Bicol Climate Change Academy shuttered

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LEGAZPI CITY—The lone Climate Change Academy here has finally been disabled as a disaster risk management teaching institution.

Founded in 2009 where local government units could enroll for a course for climate change for an effective disaster and risk management to minimize casualties in times of disaster, the Climate Change Academy will now serve as a mere research center reintegrated with the Albay Provincial Safety and Emergency Management Office (Apsemo), the agency's head, Cedric Daep, said in radio interviews.

A radio Brigada Legazpi broadcast on Tuesday said the capitol has rendered the Climate Change Academy virtually abolished after the office was divested of employees. Gov. Al Francis Bichara allegedly was not convinced of the programs of former Gov. Joey Sarte Salceda on risk management.

Salceda was the proponent of the Climate Change Academy, located inside the Bicol University, with President Benigno Aquino III as the principal guest during its inauguration in 2009.

Salceda explained the function of the Climate Change Academy, where anyone from the LGUs could enroll as an special course to attain training on disaster and risk management at the expense of the LGUs.

In 2013, Salceda was hailed by Malacañang after obtaining zero casualties during Typhoon "Glenda," underscoring the then-governor as the country's climate change guru.

Salceda could not be reached for comment on the academy's closure at press time.

In his nine years' stint as governor since 2007, Salceda introduced what was dubbed by local leaders as an exemplary disaster risk management program.

Salceda's critics, however, accused the governor of excessive and highly elaborated disaster implementation at the expense of taxpayers, saying many of the Capitol full force evacuation efforts, usually executed three days before the expected typhoon landfall, usually failed to materialize.

The former governor's critics noted that Salceda's evacuation efforts wasted millions in the guise of disaster preparedness. Residents, however, claimed they have missed the disaster preparedness executed under Salceda.

They said that aside from the radio reports tapped to regularly air weather status based on weather bureau updates aired almost every 20 minutes, residents also receive regular updates of the weather status through their cellphones handled by Salceda-tasked Capitol "text brigade" round the clock.

The residents said that after Salceda, they no longer receive updates about weather status, which have been minimized under the present administration.

“Better an elaborate preparedness for the sake of public safety,” said Bicol University Professor Dr. Arme Tan, 82.

With Salceda out of the Capitol following his election as congressman of the province’s second district, Albay suffered a costly lesson on Christmas Day last year, when half of the expected 130,000 residents Capitol had asked to evacuate during Typhoon “Nina” failed to leave their homes, leading to the death of five residents.

Bichara explained that Capitol had given its support for the full evacuation and that residents got strong warnings of the powerful typhoon, “but the residents were just too stubborn to obey.”

Bichara’s spokesman Danny Garcia also refuted radio reports about the climate change academy issue, and allegations that Bichara has discarded the former administration’s climate change programs. Garcia said what he read in Bichara’s mind was that he wants to introduce some innovation regarding disaster program.

Asked if the Climate Change Academy would still function as a teaching school for LGUs who would wish to enroll to study disaster management, Garcia refused to answer.