

ENVIRONMENTAL CRACKDOWN CONTINUES: DENR issues notices to 49 establishments in Siargao

By Jed Macapagal
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As part of its crackdown on popular tourist destinations, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has ordered 49 business establishments to address environmental problems in the island of Siargao in Surigao del Norte.

“This is an example of quick action by our regional officials. Within two months, they have finished surveying tourism establishments in the beautiful (Siargao) island and they have already separated those who are compliant with environmental laws and those who are not,” Roy Cimatu, environment chief, said in a statement.

Cimatu said based on data from DENR-Caraga, out of 148 businesses in Siargao Island, 49 establishments were given notices of violation of either the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act or the Environmental Impact Statement System.

The violations of the businesses, which are mostly resorts and restaurants, also include failing to secure environmental compliance certificates (ECCs) and absence of sewage treatment facilities.

“Right now, they are serving notices of violations to the identified establishments, and by the end of the month, they aim to finish serving them, conducting the associated technical conferences, and determining whether to elevate the case to the Pollution Adjudication Board,” Cimatu said.

Regional environmental officers of Caraga said other problems threatening the island involve inconsistent water quality, issuance of business permits by the local government without requiring an ECC, absence of sewage and septage treatment facilities, coastal encroachment, improper solid waste management, inadequate drainage system and inadequate utilization of the environmental fee.

DENR-CARAGA is also eyeing to fast track the approval for the 10-year solid waste management plans of local government units to pave way for the construction of a sanitary landfill; coordination on the collection, transportation and treatment of sewage and septage; mandating of ECC to issue business permits; and requiring resorts and other establishments to set up their own sewage treatment plants.

Siargao Island is protected under a presidential decree signed in 1996 as it is home to endemic flora and fauna, but has recently become a favorite destination for international surfers.

Earlier, after a crackdown on establishments in Boracay, DENR also mobilized a regional investigating team in Panglao Island, Bohol to check if resorts and commercial establishments comply with the Clean Water Act and Solid Waste Management Act.

“We have learned our lessons in the problems concerning Boracay. We have to strictly enforce environmental laws in order to protect the country’s tourism sites so that the future generations will be able to enjoy them as well,” Cimatu said.

Technical personnel from the Environmental Management Bureau-Central Visayas and DENR office in Bohol comprised the investigation team.

Gilbert Gonzales, DENR-Central Visayas regional director, said he checked the sewage and wastewater facilities including the garbage disposal systems of each establishment operating within the island especially those along the coastal areas.

“Once the list of erring establishments is formed, we will issue notices of violation to owners and operators of these businesses. Cease and Desist orders will be given to enterprises whose owners fail to take appropriate action,” he added.

DENR classifies the coastal waters of Panglao as class SB, which is accorded to tourist zones that are intended for recreational water class 1 used for swimming, ecotourism and other related activities and for fishery water class 3 considered as spawning area for Bangus and similar species.

Likewise, the regional office of the DENR is appealing to local government leaders to declare Panglao Coastal waters as water quality management area that will be closely monitored by authorities.

A proposal will also be made to business establishments to join the Adopt-a-Waterbody program and schedule regular cleanup activities along the shorelines of Panglao Island.

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