

DENR gets tougher vs Manila Bay pollution

BY PHILIPPINES NEWS AGENCY
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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will further intensify the crackdown on pollution in Manila Bay starting next year to help improve its quality and save the water body from further environmental degradation, as the Supreme Court ordered.

DENR is scheduled to meet next month with stakeholders to discuss measures to reduce the volume of indiscriminately disposed garbage in areas along Manila Bay, including untreated discharges from informal settlements that eventually flow into the bay and raise its level of coliform bacteria.

“The objective is to bring down coliform level in Manila Bay,” Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu said.

He highlighted the urgency for action, noting coliform level in Manila Bay already surged to over 300 million most probable number per 100 milliliters (mpn/100 ml).

“Manila Bay is unfit for swimming at present,” he said.

According to DENR, the safe coliform level is 100 mpn/100ml.

Cimatu targets lowering the coliform level in Manila Bay to an even safer level of less than 100 mpn/100 ml, so its waters can be fit again for swimming and other forms of recreation.

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Coliform bacteria level is commonly used as an indicator of water pollution, according to experts. Pollution in Manila Bay has been mainly linked to land-based human activities, including discharge of municipal, industrial and agricultural wastes aside from land runoff.

In 2008, the Supreme Court ordered DENR and other agencies to clean up, rehabilitate and preserve Manila Bay so its waters can be fit for recreation.

The planned crackdown against pollution in Manila Bay is in accordance with the high tribunal's order.

While Manila Bay is the premier international gateway to Metro Manila, its coastal area includes parts of Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan and Cavite.

DENR said seven major rivers intersect Manila Bay's 190-kilometer long coastline that are major sources of pollution.

Issue on informal settlers

Environment Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said DENR is coordinating with the Department of the Interior and Local Government regarding informal settlers in areas bordering Manila Bay, so government can relocate them eventually.

Local government units (LGUs) must no longer tolerate further proliferation of informal settlements, he said.

"We'll file charges against local officials for environmental problems stemming from such settlements in their areas," Antiporda said.

Informal settlers' dwellings generally lack sanitary facilities and they discharge feces and other wastes directly to the environment.

Republic Act 9003, or the "Ecological Solid Waste Management Act," tasks LGUs nationwide as front liners in implementing solid waste management (SWM) programs in their areas of jurisdiction.

Solid waste "shall refer to all discarded household, commercial waste, non-hazardous institutional and industrial waste, street sweepings, construction debris, agricultural waste, and other non-hazardous/non-toxic solid waste," according to the Act.

SWM is "the discipline associated with the control of generation, storage, collection, transfer and transport, processing, and disposal of solid wastes in a manner that is in accordance with the best principles of public health, economics, engineering, conservation, aesthetics, and other environmental considerations, and that is also responsive to public attitudes," it added.

Measures to reduce garbage dumping and informal settlements' untreated discharges, including possible use of technologies like silt curtains for containing waste, will form part of the rehabilitation plan for Manila Bay.

Cimatu said DENR aims to use some of its funds to help rehabilitate Manila Bay.

"We have fines paid for violation of environmental laws, so we'll try to find out if these can be used for the rehabilitation," he said.

He expects the plan's implementation to result in a cleaner, less coliform-tainted Manila Bay by Christmas next year.

“I’m very optimistic this can be done so I hope everyone will join us in this endeavor and hand over Manila Bay to the next generation,” Cimatú added.

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