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[COMMONSENSE](#) - [Marichu A. Villanueva](#) (The Philippine Star) - February 25, 2019 - 12:00am

In last week's Kapihan sa Manila Bay, we continued our focused discussions on the rehabilitation of Manila Bay. We have invited Manila City Administrator Atty. Erickson "Jojo" Alcovendaz, Jennifer Rufo of Maynilad Water Services Inc. and Jeric Sevilla of Manila Water Co. Inc. whose respective offices are among the members of the newly created Manila Bay Rehabilitation Task Force.

Created under Administrative Order (AO) No. 16 that President Rodrigo Duterte signed on Feb. 19, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) headed by Secretary Roy Cimatu was designated as its lead agency. President Duterte also designated Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Eduardo Año and Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Berna Romulo-Puyat as vice-chairpersons of the Task Force.

It can be gleaned from the composition of the Task Force under AO 16 the "wholistic," or "holistic" as others would spell it, program laid down to fully implement the 2008 mandamus of the Supreme Court to clean up and rehabilitate the Manila Bay.

The President empowered the Task Force to enforce the country's sanitation code "to ensure the complete rehabilitation, restoration and conservation of the Manila Bay." They can also require all structures and facilities around Manila Bay, including households, "to immediately connect existing sewage lines to available sewerage treatment plants (STPs), or to construct individual STPs."

This is to enable the Task Force to perform its mandate under AO 16 to improve the water quality of Manila Bay by reducing the coliform level in all of its major river systems and tributaries.

The President issued the same marching orders to local chief executives in Metro Manila, Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan and Cavite to "ensure implementation of critical environmental laws... within their respective territorial jurisdictions." The Task Force is mandated to craft a comprehensive plan for "massive relocation" of informal settler families (ISF) – the politically correct term for squatters – living around the Manila Bay.

According to Cimatu, only 15 percent of the water-served population in the National Capital Region is connected to a sewer system with either the Maynilad Water or the Manila Water. But more than 200,000 ISF residing along esteros and riverbanks discharge human wastes at the waterways that eventually end up at the Manila Bay.

Long before AO16 was issued, the Task Force has already issued cease-and-desist orders against commercial establishments and several government buildings for supposedly not having STP and contributing to the pollution of the Manila Bay.

For the part of Maynilad and Manila Water, the two water concessionaires of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), representatives explained that commercial establishments, not them, have the obligation to install their own sewage treatment plants (STP) that will process their wastewater before being discharged eventually to sewer lines.

During our Kapihan sa Manila Bay, Rufo explained that both Maynilad and Manila Water cannot accept the wastewater of the commercial establishments because the concessionaires' mandate is for domestic waste only. "But we can accommodate them and they inter-connect with our waste water treatment facility for as long as they have their pre-treatment facility," Rufo cited.

This is because, she pointed out, the wastewater being produced by the commercial establishments mostly contain chemical effluents unlike the normal domestic household wastewater.

Under their respective contracts with the MWSS, the two concessionaires agreed to operate, maintain and invest in the water and sewerage system. Speaking for the concessionaires, Rufo and Sevilla enumerated sites of their respective STPs and additional investments to put up more but are currently being constrained by issues of right-of-way for land acquisition where they would construct the facilities.

Rufo cited Maynilad's latest investment – the construction of a P1.2-billion STP in Paranaque City which was inaugurated last month. In their other serviced areas where there are no available lands, she disclosed, Maynilad put up modular-sized STP like those in certain areas in Quezon City.

While indeed the two concessionaires are the ones investing for the construction of STPs, these are also our own investments because we, as consumers, pay for 20% environmental fee as reflected in our monthly water bills. The 20% is based on our monthly water consumption plus the foreign currency differential adjustment (FCDA) applicable to all customers.

The FCDA accounts for fluctuations of the Philippine peso against other foreign currencies, subject to periodic review and adjustment. This to enable the two concessionaires to pass on to us consumers the payment of their foreign debts to bankroll their investments on construction of STP.

What most households might not know is we can demand to have our septic tanks in our homes siphoned off. This is part of the concession contracts of both Manila Water and Maynilad with the MWSS.

Speaking for the Manila Water, Sevilla noted many Metro Manila households are not availing of this service because, in most cases, they could not find where their septic tanks are located at their homes.

There is no sewer charge for residential customers which, according to Sevilla, Manila Water customers can avail of at least every five years. But for semi-business customers, commercial and industrial customers covered by a sewer line connection, Manila Water imposes 30% of basic charge as sewer fee.

Thus, it is not only the concern of the government to save Manila Bay. Everyone must take the burden to undo the environmental degradation of the waters of the Manila Bay. Using grease traps in our kitchen is a simple way to help save Manila Bay, Sevilla urged.

Saving the Manila Bay starts right in our homes for all of us living around the famed site of the picturesque setting of the sun in this part of the country's capital city. It starts from our kitchen all the way to our toilets.

Read more at <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2019/02/25/1896457/saving-manila-bay#M6wFdQmSltlrZQm.99>