

Envi advocates accuse DENR of allowing burning of COVID-19 wastes

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MANILA, Philippines – Several environment advocate groups have slammed the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for allegedly allowing its regional offices to burn hazardous wastes used in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Break Free from Plastics (BFPP) Philippines Glenn Ymata said that this supposed memorandum which came from DENR's Environment Management Bureau (EMB) is a dangerous way of ridding spent medical equipment, as pathogens may be released in the air.

But aside from this, Ymata noted that the move is a direct violation of Republic Act No. 8749 or the country's Clean Air Act — which should be enforced by DENR in the first place.

“The DENR's proposal to incinerate and use crematoria to dispose of COVID-19 medical and hazardous waste is a blatant violation of our Clean Air Act, and will surely result in emitting toxic pollutants into our air and environment,” he said in a statement on Wednesday.

“Global health experts recognize that disinfection and sterilization are successful in killing COVID-19 pathogens. The DENR should not make this pandemic as an excuse to promote dangerous waste treatment practices,” he added.

BFPP and other groups claimed that the DENR's EMB issued the memorandum last March 26, where regional offices were allowed to use crematoria to burn COVID-19 wastes. However, no report on the supposed memo has come out as of now.

DENR says ‘that’s unlikely’

DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda has explained in a phone interview with INQUIRER.net that he was not aware of such order to burn the waste, saying that what they were doing instead was to disinfect these hazardous materials coming from the hospitals.

Antiporda emphasized that it was unlikely to burn waste through the crematoria, given that these establishments have their hands full due to the rising number of dead COVID-19 patients. Government procedures dictate that patients who die due to COVID-19 have to be cremated.

According to Health Care Without Harm Southeast Asia executive Director Ramon San Pascual, DENR knows that crematoria — whose original purpose is to incinerate bodies — are not designed to burn healthcare wastes.

“DENR is well aware that crematoria are not designed to treat municipal and healthcare wastes. This means they lack all of the necessary pollution control devices that genuine waste treatment facilities must have to protect people’s health,” San Pascual noted.

“This said, DENR is now creating another health disaster on top of this COVID-19 pandemic,” he added. “Any health facility exercising best practices for infectious waste will sufficiently manage waste potentially infected with COVID-19. There’s no need to create fear nor a need to violate the Clean Air Act and push harmful false-solutions.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a myriad of problems — including the sheer number of disposed, used personal protective equipment from hospitals and health centers handling COVID-19 cases.

On Tuesday, the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Disease was forced to [extend the ECQ](#) all over Luzon until April 30 due to the rising number of patients with the latest coronavirus strain.

As of Wednesday, Department of Health officials said that there are now at [3,870 patients](#) infected with COVID-19, 182 of which have already died while at least 96 have recovered.

Read more: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1255975/environment-advocates-accuse-denr-of-allowing-burning-of-covid-19-waste#ixzz6KA9PDtO6>

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