

NATION

## **Incinerating COVID-19 waste a ‘worst-case scenario’ option – DENR to EcoWaste**

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DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda (File photo by HENZBERG AUSTRIA / Senate Public Information and Relations Bureau)

MANILA, Philippines — Incinerating waste produced in the care of patients with the new coronavirus disease, or COVID-19, is only an option for a “worst-case scenario” being considered by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda made the clarification in a telephone interview with INQUIRER.net on Saturday.

He was referring to a March 26 memo issued by Environmental Management Bureau

Director William Cuñado was to all regional directors, who were tasked to look into incineration, among other methods, to dispose of the COVID-19 waste materials.

He stressed that the memo was internal.

He made the clarification in response to the nonprofit environmental group EcoWaste Coalition, which urged the DENR to scrap the memo.

Incineration, the group said, would be [detrimental to the environment](#) and would violate the Clean Air Act and the Code on Sanitation of the Philippines.

### **Looking at ‘bigger health care wastes’**

Antiporda added that the DENR was also being “proactive” with the memo, saying that it was looking at “bigger health care wastes in the future,” considering the rising number of COVID-19 cases.

On March 26, when the memo was issued, March 26, there were 707 confirmed COVID-19 cases. The numbers have drastically increase since then.

As of this writing, the Department of Health has recorded [6,087 COVID-19 cases](#). of the coronavirus, according to the latest data from the Department of Health.

“As of this very moment, there is still no clear answer to the question of whether it would stop there or if it would still increase. So we’re trying to look at bigger health care wastes in the future,” Antiporda said, speaking partly in Filipino.

“So now, since that’s what we’re seeing now, we’re trying to explore each and every option, if in case our waste problem becomes worse — especially in this case, because [the waste] is infectious,” he added.

Antiporda cited a 2002 Supreme Court decision on the case between the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and Jancom Environmental Corp., saying that the process of incineration was allowed as long it passed the standards of the Clean Air Act.

“Now, since we are here to protect the environment, we are not in any way interested to go into burning this hospital waste,” Antiporda said. “But if in case we have no choice — this is the last flat option, the worst scenario — we will have no choice but to give in to that as a lesser evil.”

Antiporda also said the group was “capitalizing” on the DENR’s name.

“It seems to be like they’re capitalizing on the good name of DENR, trying to destroy its good name, telling the people around the world that we are not doing our job. And that is not the right way to deal with this COVID-19 issue,” he said.

Read more: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1260933/denr-answers-ecowaste-using-incinerators-crematoriums-on-covid-19-waste-only-an-option#ixzz6K4G2fAfF>

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