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Gatchalian pushes for bill promoting waste-to-energy management

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Senator Sherwin Gatchalian on Thursday, April 15, pushed for the passage of a bill that allows the use of waste-to-energy (WTE) technology for the proper disposition and management of wastes in the country.



Senator Sherwin Gatchalian (MANILA BULLETIN FILE PHOTO)

Gatchalian said the accumulation of household wastes as a result of the lockdowns—including medical wastes—has given rise to the need for proper waste management and other solid wastes management treatment facilities, especially amid the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Senate energy committee panel chief added the Department of Health (DOH) itself requires medical wastes to undergo waste treatment before being hauled to disposal facilities.

“Contrary to arguments that the operation of a WTE plant poses a threat to public health and the environment, such a facility will require air pollution control systems to ensure emissions are within the standards of the Philippine Clean Air Act,” Gatchalian said.

“The bill establishing the framework for WTE facilities specifies this,” he pointed out.

Senate Bill No. 1789 or the proposed “Waste-To-Energy” Act, primarily seeks to establish a regulatory framework for facilities utilizing waste-to-energy technologies for the proper waste management. WTE is the process of generating energy from treatment of waste through various technologies.

Under the bill, only waste treatment technologies that do not emit toxic and poisonous fumes into the environment and complies with relevant laws, rules, and regulations shall be allowed.

Gatchalian said that if a WTE facility is found to be non-compliant, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) can provide sanctions and penalize the facility or close it.

The bill also provides environmental and health safeguards with the DENR and the DOH both playing a key role in the regulation of these facilities.

The senator pointed out that in the last two decades, the WTE industries in Europe, North America, and Asia have developed technologies that are currently among the cleanest sources of thermoelectric energy, the conversion of heat directly into electricity.

WTE plants in Italy, Spain, Japan, and Germany have also shown that emissions are highly controlled and have passed their stringent regulations, he added.

“WTE can even be a leading contributor to the planned reduction of greenhouse gas emissions as it will reduce fossil fuel usage and increase energy production through the use of renewable sources,” he said.

Gatchalian also debunked claims WTE would be costly and won’t contribute to post COVID-19 recovery.

He said that under the measure, it is the project proponent that will shoulder the expense in the construction and operation of the facility and not the local government units (LGUs).

He assured that the processing fee paid by LGUs to these facilities will be subject to a “fair, reasonable, and equitable standard” criteria and guideline.

The lawmaker also rejected assumptions that the country may resort to importation of trash, emphasizing that Section 14 of the bill prohibits WTE facilities from using imported municipal solid waste as WTE feedstock for a WTE facility.

“Otherwise, these facilities will be penalized,” Gatchalian said.

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