

DENR's Valdez says no letup in drive to shut down 'illegal' garbage dumps

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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Monday vowed to intensify the campaign against erring local officials who fail to enforce Republic Act (RA) 9003, or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act.

Environment Undersecretary and National Anti-Environmental Crime Task Force (NAECTF) Head Art Valdez said the DENR, in coordination with the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) and the Office of the Ombudsman would press charges against officials who failed to enforce the garbage law.

“The Ombudsman have already filed cases against 50 LGUs [local government units] and the filing of cases will continue,” Valdez said.

“There will be no letup in the campaign. We will [also] file charges,” he said.

Revamp

IN a related development, Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez had ordered a massive revamp of field officials in the DENR starting with the agency's 17 regional offices.

Named regional directors are Francisco Moreno for Region 1; Gil Aromin, Region 2; Francisco Milla, Region 3; Arsenio Tanchuling, Region 4A; Natividad Bernardino, Region 4B; Crisanta Marlene Rodriguez, Region 5; Jim Sampulna, Region 6; Emma Melana, Region 7; Leonardo Sibbaluca, Region 8; Felix Mirasol, Region 9; Paquito Melicor, Region 10; Edwin Andot, Region 11; Reynulfo Juan, Region 12; Charlie Fabre, Region 13; Ludy Wagan, National Capital Region; Ralph Pablo, Cordillera Administrative Region; and Al Orolfo, Negros Island Region.

The official said she is still evaluating potential candidates for positions who will take over 78 provincial environment and natural officers, and 140 community environment and natural resources Officers.

Closure

Last week Lopez had ordered the closure of the Payatas Sanitary Landfill operated by the Quezon City government and the Inayawan Sanitary Landfill operated by the Cebu City LGU to prevent water pollution.

According to the NSWMC, around 20 percent to 30 percent of uncollected wastes end up clogging water ways, including creeks, esteros and rivers, aggravating the sorry state of inland water bodies.

Raps

Ely Ildelfonso, executive director of the NSWMC Secretariat, said more than 3,000 local officials are facing charges for failing to shut down stinking open dumps all over the country.

The local officials facing charges include mayors and members of the city or municipal councils.

This year Ildelfonso said the NSWMC, in coordination with the Office of the Ombudsman, will pursue cases against officials belonging to 100 LGUs, mainly for failing to enforce RA 9003, which requires the closure of open dumps.

This is the second batch of LGU officials who will be slapped with charges related to alleged violation of the garbage laws. Operating open dumps also violate the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act, especially when dumps are situated near waterways and tend to emit pollutants that pollute the air.

“This year we are filing cases against officials belonging to 100 LGUs. This is the second batch,” Ildelfonso said. He said at least 10 local officials are facing charges per LGU.

Last year the Office of the Ombudsman filed similar charges against 600 local officials, the first batch of officials belonging to 50 LGUs, for the same offense.

This year and next, Ildelfonso said, the NSWMC will pursue cases against officials of 200 LGUs, Ildelfonso said.

The NSWMC and the Office of the Ombudsman are filing cases by batches, considering the number of cases that have to be filed against erring LGU officials.

Most of the local officials fail to shut down open dumps within their respective localities as mandated by RA 9003, despite repeated demands by the NSWMC.

Based on the NSWMC’s record, Ildelfonso said some 350 LGUs failed to stop the operation of open dumps within their respective jurisdictions, making local officials criminally and administratively liable.

RA 9003 aims to address the country’s garbage problem through proper solid-waste management.

Under Section 10 of RA 9003, LGUs are primarily responsible for the implementation and enforcement of the provisions of the law within their respective jurisdictions.

The same provision states that “segregation and collection of solid waste shall be conducted at the barangay level, specifically for biodegradable, compostable and reusable wastes.

Budget lack

The law, which promotes waste reduction from source through segregation, recycling and composting, prohibits the operation of open dumps and promotes the establishment of sanitary landfills.

Lack of budget is the common reason why LGUs fail to enforce RA 9003. This is because LGUs do not allocate local funds for proper solid-waste management.

According to Ildelfonso, the NSWMC continues to provide technical training to build the capacity of LGUs.

On a positive note, Ildelfonso said more than 90 percent of all LGUs now have their own solid-waste management plans.

“When I assumed as executive director of the NSWMC Seretariat, only about 40 LGUs have their own solid-waste management plans. Now, only about 170 LGUs do not have approved plans. What we are doing now is helping LGUs in updating their approved plans,” Ildelfonso said.

He said by the end of the year, all LGUs are expected to have an approved solid-waste management plan.

Ildelfonso added the NSWMC is closely coordinating with the Department of the Interior and Local Government to achieve 100-percent compliance by LGUs in terms of solid-waste management plans by the end of year.

The management plans serve as guide on how LGUs intend to enforce proper solid-waste management, which include hauling, segregation, recycling, composting and disposal of garbage.

With its estimated population of 12 million, Metro Manila alone produces an estimated 9,000 tons of garbage a day, or 3.29 million tons a year, Ildelfonso said.

Metro Manila's garbage produce accounts to nearly 25 percent of estimated country total of 40,000 tons of garbage a day, or 14.6 million tons a year.

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