

Managing our solid waste

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Managing our Solid Waste: An Overview of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act

Much had been written about the worsening problem of solid waste in Metro Manila and other urban centers in the country. Even more were fora, seminars and conferences conducted to discuss ways of solving the problem. For how long would it take us to attain a zero waste economy, no one knows. But, one thing is sure - time is running out and WE need to act NOW! Why WE? The answer is simple, but at the same time, mind-boggling. Let's take a look at the statistics of Metro Manila's solid waste. Based on studies made by the National Solid Waste Management Commission Secretariat based at the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), it is estimated that the per capita waste production daily is 0.5 kg. This means that for every person living in the metropolis, he or she generates half a kilo of waste a day. With an estimated population of 10.5 million, total waste generated in Metro Manila alone could run up to 5,250 metric tons per day. Or, 162,750 metric tons per month. Or, 1.95 million metric tons per year. Definitely, that's a lot of waste to speak of. Next, let's talk about how our daily waste is being disposed of. Again, based on the EMB study, only about 73% of the 5,250 metric tons of waste generated daily are collected by dump trucks hired by our respective local government units. That is assuming our LGUs are faithful to their duties to us, taxpayers. The remaining 27% of our daily waste or about 1,417.5 metric tons end up in canals, vacant spaces, street corners, market places, rivers and other places where, ironically, there's a sign that reads "HUWAG MAGTAPON NG BASURA DITO. ANG MAHULI, BUGBOG SARADO!" That explains why WE need to act. As part of the problem, because we produce garbage ourselves, we can also

be part of the solution by reducing our contribution to the waste problem. Why NOW? Because at the rate we are producing waste, we will soon find ourselves buried in our own trash. Or, shall we say, we will soon be having more of our human-made mountains of garbage amidst us? The tragedy that has befallen the residents of Payatas dump site in Quezon City, when its mountain of garbage slid down, burying in its course not a few garbage pickers, should strengthen our resolve to do something about our wasteful lifestyles. Second, talks about landfill, as an alternative engineering solution to the garbage problem for the so-called residual waste, is fine. But where to site the landfill is another thing. For years, negotiations for landfill for Metro Manila's garbage had elicited not only long debates among our political leaders but also emotional outbursts from prospective host communities. Perhaps the most important reason why we have to act now on the worsening solid waste problem is their impact on human health. Health is a basic human right. We all deserve to live in a cleaner environment. We all desire for a healthy family... a healthy neighborhood... a healthy nation. And, the only way to satisfy these desires is to do away with garbage that breeds flies, roaches, rodents and harmful bacteria that can spread diseases in our homes and in our communities. While there were already efforts in the past to address the problem head-on, the passage of Republic Act (R. A.) No. 9003, otherwise known as the " Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000", marked the turning point in the national development agenda for improved solid waste management and resource conservation. 1. What is R. A. No. 9003? Republic Act No. 9003 or the " Ecological Solid Waste Management Act" provides the legal framework for the country's systematic,

comprehensive and ecological solid waste management program that shall ensure protection of public health and the environment. It underscores, among other things, the need to create the necessary institutional mechanisms and incentives, as well as imposes penalties for acts in violation of any of its provisions. The implementing rules and regulations of R. A. No. 9003 are contained in DENR Administrative Order No. 2001-34.

2. What are the salient features of R. A. No. 9003?

a. Creation of the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC), the National Ecology Center (NEC) and the Solid Waste Management Board in every province, city and municipality in the country. The NSWMC shall be responsible in the formulation of the National Solid Waste Management Framework and other policies on solid waste, in overseeing the implementation of solid waste management plans and the management of the solid waste management fund. The NEC, on the other hand, shall be responsible for consulting, information, training and networking services relative to the implementation of R. A. No. 9003. The Solid Waste Management Board of provinces, cities and municipalities shall be responsible for the development of their respective solid waste management plans.

b. Formulation of the National Solid Waste Management Framework; 10-year solid management plans by local government units consistent with the National Solid Waste Management Framework;

c. Mandatory segregation of solid waste to be conducted primarily at the source such as household, institutional, industrial, commercial and agricultural sources;

d. Setting of minimum requirements to ensure systematic collection and transport of wastes and the proper protection of the health of garbage collectors;

e. Establishment of reclamation programs

and buy-back centers for recyclable and toxic materials; f. Promotion of eco-labeling in local products and services; g. Prohibition on non-environmentally acceptable products and packaging; h. Establishment of Materials Recovery Facility in every barangay or cluster of barangays; i. Prohibition against the use of open dumps; j. Setting of guidelines/criteria for the establishment of controlled dumps and sanitary landfills; k. Provision of rewards, incentives both fiscal and non-fiscal, financial assistance, grants and the like to encourage LGUs and the general public to undertake effective solid waste management; and l. Promotion of research on solid waste management and environmental education in the formal and non-formal sectors.

3. How can we help solve the solid waste problem? There are many ways to do it. A highly recommended formula is to adopt the 3Rs of Ecological Waste Management: REDUCE, REUSE, AND RECYCLE. In addition to that, let us refrain from doing what have been prohibited under the law, to include but are not limited to the following:

- a. Littering, throwing, dumping of waste materials in public places like roads, sidewalks, canals, esteros, parks and establishments;
- b. Open burning of solid waste;
- c. Allowing the collection of non-segregated or unsorted waste;
- d. Squatting in open dumps and landfills;
- e. Open dumping or burying of biodegradable and non-biodegradable materials in flood-prone areas;
- f. Unauthorized removal of recyclable material intended for collection by authorized persons;
- g. Mixing of source-separated recyclable material with other solid waste in any vehicle, box, container or receptacle used in solid waste collection or disposal;
- h. Manufacture, distribution or use of non-environmentally acceptable packaging materials;
- i. Establishment or operation of open dumps; and
- j.

Importation of consumer products packaged in non-environmentally acceptable materials. For further inquiries, please contact: The National Solid Waste Management Commission Secretariat ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT BUREAU-DENR, Tel. No. 920-22-52