

## **DENR proposes P181.6-M budget for COVID-19 waste management**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is eyeing a P181.6-million allocation for the establishment of preliminary treatment and storage facility for coronavirus-related healthcare waste from its P774-million solid waste management program budget for 2022.

Through the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), the DENR is planning to provide funds for 227 local government units (LGUs) nationwide representing 81 provinces and 146 cities for the proper collection, treatment, storage and disposal of protective personal equipment, syringes, vials and other COVID-related healthcare wastes from households, vaccination sites, and testing and quarantine facilities.

DENR Secretary Roy A. Cimatu said the plan will help address the increase in COVID-19-related healthcare wastes in the country during the pandemic.

"While COVID-19 cases in the country have started to decline, healthcare wastes generated by the situation have continuously become a challenge among cities and provinces. Through this program, we hope to support LGUs in improving the collection of COVID-19 related healthcare wastes especially in remote areas and among small generators that are not serviced by treatment, storage and disposal (TSD) facilities," said Cimatu.

"The proposed treatment and storage facility will serve as a temporary and transit point for COVID-19 related healthcare wastes such as personal protective equipment, syringes, needles, and vials for chemical disinfection and storage before these are transported to a TSD facility," added Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and LGUs Concerns Benny D. Antiporda.

The proposed waste management program was announced by Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change chair Senator Cynthia Villar, who sponsored the DENR budget during the upper chamber's plenary session on November 15.

"I hope in behalf of the Senate that this program towards giving to 81 provinces and 146 cities of treatment and storage facility of COVID-19 (related healthcare wastes) will be the first priority of the DENR. We have allocated a big part of the budget for solid waste management program of the DENR and they will use this budget for this," Villar said during the plenary session.

The proposal was developed by the DENR based on the recommendation of Villar and Senator Francis Tolentino during the Senate budget hearing last month to extend more assistance to LGUs for the management of COVID-related healthcare wastes.

The proposed P181.6 million budget will be coursed through the DENR regional offices. Each LGU that will receive P800,000 for the establishment of special waste facilities.

The DENR, however, pointed out that the COVID-19 healthcare waste program for LGUs does not cover medical wastes coming from hospitals.

Aside from the preliminary treatment and storage facility, the solid waste management program budget for 2022 will include support for the establishment of trash traps, collection and disposal services for garbage patches, provision of solid waste management equipment such shredders, composters, and plastic recycling equipment for LGUs nationwide, and hauling services for solid waste collected in Boracay.

In April 2020, the DENR-led National Solid Waste Management Commission issued Resolution 1364 entitled “Adopting the Interim Guidelines on the Management of COVID-19 Related Health Care Waste” directing LGUs to develop a COVID-19 waste management plan that will adopt the guidelines on segregation and storage at source, collection and transport, and treatment and disposal.

The COVID-19 waste management plan is one of the requirements for the 10-year mandated solid waste management plan of local governments. ###