

NSWMC orders stricter law enforcement vs open burning of garbage

The National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC), chaired by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), has approved a resolution imposing stricter law enforcement against the open burning of solid and agricultural wastes and providing alternative means of waste disposal across the country.

"The open burning of solid wastes which includes agricultural wastes has long been prohibited by virtue of RA 9003. However, this has not been religiously adhered to, as open burning is still prevalent in communities, farming, and other agricultural activities especially in the rural areas of the country," said DENR Secretary Roy A. Cimatu referring to the traditional small-scale community method of solid waste disposal and management, locally known as "siga."

Cimatu also said that the farmers' practice of burning their fields to clear stubbles, weeds, and waste before growing a new crop could reduce soil fertility.

In a virtual en banc meeting last November 24, NSWMC Alternate Chair and DENR Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units (LGUs) Concerns Benny D. Antiporda led the approval of NSWMC Resolution No. 1468, Series of 2021, to "strengthen the enforcement of the provisions of Republic Act (RA) 9003 on open burning of municipal solid wastes including agricultural wastes."

RA 9003 is known as the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000.

"While we understand that we cannot immediately eradicate all open burning activities, we came up with this resolution to strengthen alternative means of waste disposal and spread awareness on the harmful effects of open burning. Hopefully, this will lead to the gradual removal of open burning," said Antiporda.

As of November 24, 2021, a total of 1,128 LGUs out of 1,716 have 10-year solid waste management (SWM) plans approved by the Commission, which include the goal to achieve a full collection coverage among the LGUs.

The NSWMC recognized that "some LGUs are still in the initial stages of developing their SWM plans" and that "LGUs are yet to accomplish a 100 percent collection coverage in their respective jurisdictions."

Through NSWMC Resolution No. 1468, member agencies from the public and private sector as well as other government agencies have been given specific responsibilities to enforce the provisions of RA 9003 on open burning of solid and agricultural wastes.

The DENR, Philippine Information Agency, and the Department of Health are encouraged to promote awareness on the effects of open burning on the environment and a person's physical health, as well as on the existing waste processing and purchasing markets.

The Department of Trade Industry will also boost consumer awareness in agricultural waste management while the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority and LGUs will focus on the 3Rs—Reduce, Reuse, Recycle—advocacy.

The private sector, non-governmental organizations, manufacturing and packaging, and recycling industries will also help through IEC campaigns and in developing programs on open burning alternatives.

"The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Department of Education, and Commission on Higher Education to include in their curriculum development the environmental and health effects of open burning," the resolution read.

The Department of Agriculture will develop policies and guidelines on agricultural waste management while LGUs will establish local ordinances to improve waste collection and disposal, operationalize composting and recycling mechanisms, and increase the capacity of waste disposal facilities.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government will be responsible for environmental audits on the implementation of the 10-year SWM plans of LGUs and will assist them in its local ordinances and ensure the holistic management of solid wastes.

Meanwhile, the Department of Science and Technology will develop, promote, and evaluate the best available technologies and environmental practices alternatives to open burning, and the Department of Public Works and Highways will develop infrastructures that will help decrease open burning.

According to the World Health Organization, dioxin and furan, known to be sourced from open burning, among others, are "highly toxic and can cause reproductive and developmental problems, damage the immune system, interfere with hormones, and also cause cancer." ###