

Celebrating Christmas, the Environment-friendly Way

Celebrating this holiday season creates loads of extra trash and solid waste beyond what is normally generated, especially with the Filipino practice of gift giving, having special family meals, Christmas parties, and various holiday events.

The holiday spirit extends until New Year in the streets, with the air thick with pyrotechnic smoke and mounds of garbage everywhere especially the morning after.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Assistant Secretary Juan Miguel T. Cuna said, “Celebrating the Christmas Season and the coming New Year is the most awaited among the yearly events for every Filipino family. Expectedly, enjoying festivities during the holiday season has been one of the great producers of trash, and intensifier of pollution.”

“It has always been the Department’s campaign to observe and practice proper waste management, among others, to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change,” Cuna said.

Indeed, there are ways to celebrate Christmas and New Year waste-and-pollution-free. Caring for the environment, after all, is everyone’s concern all year round.

Here are some easy tips for more creative and environment-friendly celebration of the holidays:



REUSE

Whenever practicable, reuse items that are still useful instead of just throwing them away. Maintain and repair durable products. Borrow, rent, or share items that are not used frequently. Sell or donate goods instead of just throwing them out. It would greatly help if we patronize goods that are reusable, instead of disposable items.

- You can make your own gift-wrapping paper from old gift wrappers, old maps, newspapers, magazines, or from old decorated paper bags. Use wadded newspaper and shredded paper as filler for your gifts.
- Give reusable tote bags, lunch bags, travel mugs, house plants, and hand-made items.
- Put the small gift in a big gift. Cookies in a flower pot, chocolates in decorated canisters, or jewelry wrapped in handkerchief or scarf are just some of the surprises you can pull off.
- Don’t throw away ribbons and bows, they can be used in other occasions. A sack will come in handy while gifts are being opened to avoid clutter.

- Christmas trees have become very costly, so your tree should not end up in the garbage bin, but in storage for next year.

REDUCE

According to the National Solid Waste Commission (NSWC), 9,000 tons of solid wastes are generated in Metro Manila every day. Of this, 74 percent comes from household wastes, information that confirms our fears that—yes—we all have a hand in polluting the environment though we may not be aware of it.

In relation to this, as per record, the Metro Manila Development Authority through the Metro Parkway Clearing Group disclosed that street sweepers and clearing groups collected 26 truckloads or equivalent to 156 tons of garbage just hours after the New Year revelry in 2014.

So next time you throw away your trash, remember these: you save landfill space, save raw materials and natural resources such as energy and water, and money. We can easily reduce the amount of waste we produce using these simple steps.

- Always take your own shopping bags when doing your groceries and marketing in your public market, and/or malls
- Choose products with minimal packaging and avoid individually wrapped products
- Buy products in reusable, refillable and recyclable packaging
- Avoid packaging fruits and vegetables in plastic bags
- Buy long-lasting kitchen utensils, household products and clothing
- Mend broken appliances and furniture, where possible
- Reduce packaging by buying in bulk. Remember the saying “cheaper by the dozen”
- Avoid wasteful consumption of goods. Begin by asking yourself: “Do I really need it?”

RECYCLE

Recycling as defined in the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (ESWMA) or Republic Act 9003 is “the process of treating the waste to make it suitable for a beneficial use, and may even transform the waste material into a new product, which could also be used as raw materials for the production of other goods and services. “

Waste should be treated as a valuable resource. Items that are useless, or of very little value to one person often have significant value to another. Portions of waste should be sorted and used for some beneficial thing.

Turn your accumulated things/materials into something useful that will not only save you money, but will help regulate garbage disposal.

Composting is another form of minimizing solid waste into a useful material. Composting refers to the controlled decomposition of organic matter by microorganisms, mainly bacteria and fungi, into humans-like product. The process utilizes biodegradable wastes from your kitchen and

garden. Compost is both a soil and a fertilizer. Compost also helps conserve moisture, prevent erosion, and reduce weed growth.

Some resort to burning solid waste in the backyard to dispose of solid wastes. But did you know that the substances from open burning of solid wastes can be fatal? Not only is it prohibited under the ESWMA, burning of wastes also has adverse effects on people's health and on the environment. Open burning releases into the atmosphere toxic substances such as dioxins, furans, sulfur oxide, toxic ash, and carbon dioxide. These elements are also major sources of air pollution that deplete the ozone layer that protects the earth from the harmful ultra-violet rays of the sun.

Better to do away with fireworks for the New Year. But, if pyrotechnics can't be avoided especially on New Year's Eve, here are some points you might consider before lighting up that Judas Belt, Super Lolo, Fountain and other expensive art fireworks.

Pyrotechnics consist mainly of fine toxic dusts or Particulate Matter 10 microgram/cu. m. (PM₁₀) that easily enter the lungs and pose real danger to those already sick and the healthy. The hazardous smoke generated from these fireworks can lead to dizziness, heart disturbances, asthma attack, allergy, and respiratory illnesses like bronchitis, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD), laryngitis, and pneumonia, among others. Besides, most firecrackers generate more than 80dB (decibels) noise that can cause temporary hearing loss.

Moreover, firecrackers contain highly toxic heavy metals like cadmium and lead, in addition to other metals like copper, manganese, zinc, sodium, magnesium, and potassium. These pollutants pose great danger to the environment through the depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, and climate change.

With these simple tips in mind, let us all celebrate the Christmas season, be safe and at the same time, also protect the environment.

The Environmental Management Bureau of the DENR wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! ###