

National policy, regulatory framework already in place for e-waste management, EMB announced

The Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources said the national policy and regulatory framework for the management of electronic waste or e-waste have long been in place.

According to EMB Director William P. Cuñado, “As early as 1990, the Philippines already has a national and regulatory framework on e-waste management with the enactment of Republic Act (RA) 6969 or the Toxic Substances and Hazardous and Nuclear Waste Control Act.”

The law seeks to regulate the importation, manufacture, processing, handling, storage, transportation, sale, distribution, use, treatment, and disposal of toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes that pose risks to human health and the environment.

Two years after the law was enacted, the implementing rules and regulations was issued under DENR Administrative Order No. 1992-29.

According to the EMB Chief, the Philippines—through the DENR—was already regulating electronics and scraps right after becoming a party to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal in 1994.

Regulated under RA 6969 are waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), which is now considered as one of the fastest growing waste streams in the Philippines.

The Global Environment Report showed that the country generated approximately 3.9 kg of e-waste per capita last year.

Also, in 2019, EMB reported that the Philippines generated a total of 32,664.41 metric tons of WEEE.

The EMB said that e-waste, such as computers, television (TV) sets, refrigerators, cell phones and other electronic devices, are a complex mixture of materials and components because of their hazardous content.

“If not properly managed, these e-wastes can cause major environmental and health problems,” Cuñado warned.

In 2013, the DENR issued another set of guidelines on the management of WEEE, which were found to contain toxic metals, such as lead, cadmium, mercury and hexavalent chromium, as well as flame retardants like polybrominated biphenyls and polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE).

Under DENR Administrative Order 2013-22, generators, transporters, and treatment, storage and disposal (TSD) facilities of hazardous waste, including WEEE, are required to register with EMB to document and provide comprehensive details of each movement of the waste with the corresponding permit to transport (PTT) and manifest or the chain-of-custody document.

A TSD facility is required to issue a certificate of treatment once the waste have been treated. This cycle follows the cradle to grave management of hazardous waste, tracking them from the point of generation to their transport, recycling, treatment and disposal.

Applications for registration as generator, transporter, and TSD facility, including PTT and manifest can now be processed through the Online Hazardous Waste Management System, which has been operational since June 1, 2020.

The DENR also monitors the importation and export of hazardous wastes through a regulatory procedure, which requires importers and exporters to secure permits and clearances from the EMB.

Importation of recyclable materials containing hazardous substances intended for recycling, recovery, or reprocessing may be allowed subject to the compliance requirements of EMB, as well as the requirements and procedures prescribed by the Basel Convention.

To further strengthen the existing regulations, Director Cuñado recently announced that the DENR is set to issue the Technical Guidelines on the Environmentally Sound Management of WEEE.

This draft administrative order aims to provide the framework mechanism for the appropriate management of WEEE, reduce the amount of electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) type of waste and the hazards brought about by its components, and promote the reuse of second-hand or used EEE and valorization of its waste component.

It also seeks to encourage involvement of all relevant agencies and stakeholders in the life cycle of EEE and institutionalize the principle of “extended producers' responsibility,” which will implement the circular economy concept on waste management.

The guidelines will also include provisions distinguishing used or second-hand from waste, which is patterned or aligned with the Basel Convention Technical Guidelines on the transboundary movements of e-waste and used EEE.

At present, EMB is implementing a project entitled “Implementation of PCB Management Programs for Electric Cooperatives and Safe E-wastes Management” with support from the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

The UNIDO-assisted project has established linkages with the community-based organizations in the informal sector, through EcoWaste Coalition, as contractor to undertake awareness raising activities.

The Integrated Recycling Industries Inc. has been providing technical training support to the local dismantlers and collect WEEE from project sites: Barangay Longos in Malabon City; Capulong Street in Tondo, Manila; and Camarin Road and Barangay Bagong Silang in Caloocan City.

The project also aims to dispose of 1.125 tons of PBDE from 50,000 units of WEEE, particularly cathode ray tubes from TV and computers. It has ongoing laboratory studies analyzing bromine, PBDE and other flame retardants in WEEE, the result of which will also serve as input to the DENR policies on the management of WEEE.

One of the innovations introduced by the project under the e-waste component is the upgrading of the materials recovery facility (MRF) of Barangay 176 in Bagong Silang, Caloocan to an e-waste TSD facility.

This pilot facility serves as a model for other barangays nationwide to establish a centralized dismantling area instead of doing it in their own households.

The workers employed in the MRF turned e-waste TSD facility came from the barangay's informal sector and training was provided by the project partner. The training included proper dismantling of e-waste, proper management of residuals, administration, inventory and maintenance of tools and equipment.

The e-waste component of the project seeks to reduce occupational exposure of women and men in the informal recycling sector, particularly the e-waste dismantlers, from dreaded neurological, developmental and reproductive toxicants such as PBDEs, lead and other hazardous chemicals.

As part of a comprehensive e-waste action plan, the DENR and EMB launched a public information and education campaign about the looming e-waste crisis, its negative effects, and a menu of proper responses.

The campaign also promotes collaborative partnerships among key stakeholders, policymakers and other national government agencies towards a shared commitment to strategic participatory action. #