

Philippines Celebrates Clean Air Month in November

The Philippines Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) called on members of the public to stop air pollution as the country celebrated Clean Air Month in November. Called "Let's All Act to Clean the Air," the event launched an intensified, all-out multi-sectoral support programme to promote awareness on issues concerning air pollution and the government's programmes on clean air. To raise public consciousness, the DENR held a series of awareness-raising activities, including transport and media fora, orientation meetings on the Clean Air Act for various stakeholders, free emissions-testing and other measures to broaden the participation of government, business, the academe and civil society in cleaning the air.

Air pollution is caused by increased emissions of carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, oxides of nitrogen and sulfur, and particulate matter from sources that burn fuels for energy. Major approaches meant to ensure clean air include the initiative of then Senator Heherson Alvarez in 1992 – the Healthy Air Pact – a voluntary reduction of lead in fuel by the country's major oil companies that paved the way for the introduction of unleaded gasoline in the market. In 1997, then President Fidel V. Ramos signed Presidential Proclamation No. 1109 declaring the month of November of every year as Clean Air Month. And in 1999, Congress passed the Philippine Clean Air Act, setting emission standards that will help curb air pollution both from stationary (power plants, factories and industries) and mobile sources (cars, jeeps, buses and other motor vehicles).

During the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in South Africa, the Philippines joined the global community in signing a declaration advocating the use of renewable, indigenous and cleaner energy sources to arrest global warming. The country was also recognized at the Earth Summit for using natural gas through the

With financial assistance from various financial institutions including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the DENR also issued Department Administrative Order No. 2002-23, establishing the Air Quality Management Fund (AQMF). The order formally activated a special account in the National Treasury to ensure continued funding for the



DENR Secretary Heherson T. Alvarez looks on as Esther Perez de Tagle, President of the Concerned Citizens Against Pollution (COCAP) signs the Manifesto for Support for the Clean Air Program of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo during the launching of the Esterol Biodiesel facility at the DENR compound in Quezon City, Philippines.

Malampaya Deep Water Gas-to-Power Project off the coast of Palawan, which won the World Business Summit Award for Sustainable Development Partnerships. Other alternative fuels that will replace the more polluting coal and fossil fuels include biodiesel. This is a type of fuel used in Europe and the United States as a clean-burning alternative fuel derived from vegetable oils, particularly coconut oil. It is one of the best substitutes for petroleum diesel in the market today, which complies with standards set by the Clean Air Act.

Clean Air Act. The AQMF can be utilised for activities that will improve the quality of air throughout the country.

Over the years, the country has made positive strides in the fight to clean the air. Yet more efforts should go to instilling a culture of responsible caring for the environment, which cannot be done by the DENR alone. Hence the call to all stakeholders, including local communities, schools, civil society, LGUs and non-government organisations (NGOs), to ensure that all citizens enjoy the right to clean air. ■