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DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiatives Service

Multa, kanselasyon ng permit binabala vs. garbage contractors na walang PPE sa palero



August 7, 2020 @ 6:50 PM 11 hours ago

Manila, Philippines – Posibleng pagmultahin ng mga local government unit (LGU) ang mga contractor ng garbage collector na hindi magpapasuot ng Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) o protective gear sa kanilang mga palero bilang proteksyon laban sa COVID-19 habang naghahakot ng basura.

Ayon kay Richard Santuile, action officer ng Quezon City Task Force Solid Waste Collection Cleaning and Disposal Services Management posibleng pagmultahin ng halagang P6,000 ang mga contractor ng garbage collector na hindi magpapasuot ng protective gear sa kanilang mga garbage collector bilang proteksyon habang naghahakot ng basura.

Sinabi pa ni Santuile na bukod sa multa posible pang makansela ang permit ng contractor na lalabag sa batas hinggil sa hindi pagpapasuot ng protective gear sa mga palero habang naghahakot ng basura.

“May kaukulang parusa at multa ang hindi pagsusuot ng protective gear sa mga garbage collector habang naghahakot ng basura” ani pa ni Santuile.

Nauna rito inirekomenda ng Department of Environment and Naturang Resources (DENR) na dapat nakasuot ng PPE at protective gear ang mga garbage collector bukod pa sa face mask habang naghahakot ng basura.

Magugunitang sinabi ni DENR Usec. Benny Antiporda, Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units Concerns na dapat nakasuot ng Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) o protective gear ang mga garbage collector habang naghahakot ng basura bilang proteksyon ng mga ito laban sa COVID-19. **Santi Celario**

DENR should listen to the people of Angono

posted August 08, 2020 at 12:30 am

by [Charlie V. Manalo](#)



NAKED THOUGHT "Can the agency override the people's will?"

If there's one good thing this pandemic has brought us, it is the opportunity for nature to heal itself. With transportation and factories literally grinding to a halt, the air has never been cleaner. In a short period of time, the waters took a respite from absorbing waste humans dispose of wantonly. Barren land has started to show signs of greeneries sprouting out.

Unfortunately, this benefit we had ironically gained from the pandemic had never been felt by the people from small town of Angono in Rizal Province, the town which prides itself as the Art Capital of the Philippines, the home of the Higantes Festival – thanks but no thanks to Concrete Aggregates Corporation and its partner, LaFarge Holcim.

For the past five decades starting in 1969, these two companies have been extracting gravel in a hilly part in Angono, covering 212 hectares. This gravel mining operation is covered by two Mineral Production and Sharing Agreements – MPSA No. 032-95-IV, covering an area of 192 hectares, and MPSA No. 055-96IV covering an area of 19.99 hectares. The former agreement supposedly expired last June 15, and the latter is set to expire on October 23 next year.

According to the town's local officials, the two companies applied for a seven-year quarry extension in 2017 but which they only learned when they asked the companies lawyers in a public hearing in January of 2018.

The town officials said the quarries shall have until 2029 to operate should the Department of Environment and Natural Resources grant their application. However, they added the Mines and Geosciences Bureau of the DENR has the discretion to approve extensions of up to 25 years in accordance with the Mining Act of 1995.

And having already extracted more than 400 million metric tons of gravel from the hills of Angono, these two companies will completely bleed the town of its remaining 58 million metric tons of gravel should DENR approve of its extension.

And this is why the whole town – from its highest official down to its last citizen – is calling on the DENR to reject the companies' application for an extension.

In October last year, Angono's Sangguniang Bayan passed Resolution No. 171 which calls for the total rejection of the extension of the quarrying operations of CAC and its partner, LaFarge.

In its resolution, the SB noted that the disadvantages brought about by the two companies' operation far outweigh the P33 million annual fees they pay to the municipality.

Among the negative effects of the quarrying operations are: The wanton destruction of the environment as brought about by the cutting of trees within the area and its vicinity which has



DENR should listen to the people of Angono Page 2/2

brought severe flooding to the low-lying areas of the town whenever a strong typhoon strikes; The imminent threat of severe damage should the Big One hits as Angono is less than 15 kilometers away from the nearest faultline which is in Pasig City; exposure of town residents to pulmonary health problem as ambient air test conducted on the quarrying areas failed. In 2015, 47 people living near the quarrying site were diagnosed with pulmonary health problems. The number has grown to 72 in 2016, 66 in 2017 and 102 in 2018.

LaFarge Holcim, for its part, is quick to defend itself saying it is practicing responsible mining and is even undergoing progressive rehabilitation of areas affected by its operations through tree planting.

The company adds its Angono operations also use a Zero Discharge System water treatment in its settling pond that prevents wastewater from being discharged from nearby water systems such as Laguna de Bai.

It also claims in its website that it is a world leader in implementing international standards and sustainability in mining.

But having stayed in Angono for almost two decades, from 1993 up to 2010, I can bear witness to the allegations of the SB in its resolution. Many times, I have witnessed floods running down the entire town of Angono, not only with rainwater but accompanied with mud and gravel every time Lafarge and CAC release water from their holding pond at the height of a typhoon. One time, an entire shanty was even carried by the flood waters coming from CAC into the Angono River down to the waters of Laguna Lake.

Ask every Angoño and you can hear the same answer – the quarrying site spells hardship for every town resident in the low-lying areas.

The sad part is, even if the town would reject its application, the DENR reportedly can override the decision of the local government unit and grant the two companies an extension for its operation.

But due to the community quarantine imposed by President Rodrigo Duterte on most parts of the country, it's not clear whether the DENR had already acted on the application, although according to Angono Vice Mayor Gerardo Calderon, the application for extension is still pending before the DENR.

Last January, before the pandemic hit, residents of Angono gathered in front of the town's municipal hall and held a rally highlighted by candle-lighting and the signing of a manifesto against the continuation of mining operations by LaFarge Holcim Holdings and the Concrete Aggregates Corporation of the Ortigas Group.

In their candle-lighting rally, Calderon lauded the townsfolk for uniting behind their call to end the quarrying operation. Fifty years is too much.

The ball is now in the court of the DENR. Will it heed the people's call?

Mining holds key to PH recovery after pandemic – Barbers

posted August 07, 2020 at 06:56 pm

by [Maricel Cruz](#)

Surigao del Norte Rep. Robert Ace Barbers on Friday urged government policymakers to take advantage of the Philippines' mineral resources to restart the economy that was devastated by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic.

The Duterte administration's economic managers "should reconsider, revisit and reinvigorate mining operations and tap these as funding source for the gloomy post-Covid-19 economic scenario being faced by the country," said Barbers, a member of the majority bloc of the House committee on economic affairs.

In the very near future, Barbers said that the country would start feeling the shockwaves of the humungous debts incurred by the government to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and implement various economic stimulus programs.

In a privileged speech, Barbers said: "It is high time that we take a good look at our mines. Mining is the only answer to our economic woes. This is the only source of funding that could pay off all the debts incurred now and stimulate growth in our economy."

As of September 2012, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau has estimated that the country has an estimated US\$840 billion worth of untapped mineral wealth. The Philippines is the fifth most mineral-rich country in the world for gold, nickel, copper, chromite, iron, lead, and zinc, many of them drawn from major deposits on Luzon and Mindanao.

"Those estimates by the MGB were made eight years ago," he said. "And the continuing rise in the worldwide prices of precious metals, particularly gold, makes the value of our untapped minerals increase to trillions of dollars."

Barbers, chair of the House committee on dangerous drugs and vice chair of the accounts committee, said the current international trading price of gold had already reached more than US\$2,000 per ounce "and our country is sitting on millions upon millions of ounces of gold deposits while other countries sits on indefinite economic uncertainty."

"Aside from gold, we also have lots of other minerals and precious metals. Just imagine the prosperity that we have been missing all this time," he said. "Are we waiting for another country to again lay claim over these wealth of ours?"

Barbers cited the case of Canada and Australia, two of several countries that have prospered from mining, employing hundreds of thousands of people, and have contributed much to their local economy.

"The mining industry (in Canada and Australia) contribute as much as 6 percent to their gross domestic product compared to our 0.6 percent mining contribution. Let us use their experience as our template. They were able to mine in their countries with minimal environmental disruptions," he said.

As of September 2016, there are about 40 metallic mines and 62 non-metallic mines operating in the country, and these mining companies have already committed P13.1 billion for the development of

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their host and neighboring communities under their Social Development and Management Programs.

Former Secretary Gina Lopez, during her short tenure as environment and natural resources secretary, ordered the closure of at least 26 mining operations citing environmental and other violations. Her successor, Secretary Roy Cimatu, has recently ordered the re-opening of at least five of these suspended mines while reviewing and assessing others for re-opening after they have corrected their lapses.

Red-backed sea eagle spotted cruising over Pasay City

Published August 7, 2020 12:08pm

A majestic red-backed sea eagle or brahminy kite was spotted flying over Pasay City in July.

A You Scooper Donald Pancho recently shared photos he was able to take of the bird flying around the harbor square area at the CCP Complex on two different days last month.



Toxic chemicals may be in fast food wrappers and take-out containers, report says

By Sandee LaMotte, CNN

Published Aug 7, 2020 3:29:06 PM



A new report finds toxic chemicals called PFAS in the food packaging on fast food burgers at McDonald's and Burger King as well as on supposedly "environmentally safe" fiber take-out containers at other restaurants. (Photo by Mind the Store campaign/Toxic-Free Future)

(CNN) -- What's the first thing you should worry about when you look at the packaging on your fast food or takeout?

No, it's not Covid-19 -- science assures us the risk of catching the novel coronavirus that way is miniscule.

Worry instead about the toxic chemicals coating the wrappers of your fast food burger or your molded-fiber container full of salad or veggies, says a new report by environmental advocacy groups Toxic-Free Future and Mind the Store. It's a campaign run by Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families to encourage manufacturers to avoid toxic chemicals in products.

The report, entitled "Packaged in Pollution: Are food chains using PFAS in packaging?," was released Thursday.

Testing by the groups revealed toxic PFAS substances -- man-made perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl chemicals -- in the food packaging of Burger King's "Whopper," chicken nuggets and cookies; in Wendy's paper bags; and in McDonald's wrappers for the "Big Mac," french fries and cookies.

"As the largest fast-food chain in the world, McDonald's has a responsibility to its customers to keep them safe. These dangerous chemicals don't belong in its food packaging. I, for one, am NOT 'lovin' it," said Mike Schade, Mind the Store campaign director, in a statement.

In addition, so-called "environmentally friendly" molded fiber bowls and containers sold by the Mediterranean culinary chain Cava, the Canadian restaurant franchise Freshii and fast-casual salad chain Sweetgreen tested extremely high for PFAS, according to the report.

In fact, paper-fiber containers showed the highest levels of any packaging tested.



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"Ecologically friendly doesn't mean human health friendly. Those are two different considerations," said Dr. Leonardo Trasande, chief of environmental pediatrics at NYU Langone, who was not involved in the study. "This example in the report really brings that home."

However, not all of the tested wrappings contained these dangerous chemicals. Paperboard cartons or clamshells for French fries, potato tots and fried chicken pieces sold at the three burger chains all tested below the screening level, the report found.

"This is a very clear demonstration that chemicals that are present in our food packaging don't have to be," said microbiologist Linda Birnbaum, the former director of the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences and the National Toxicology Program.

"In other words, you can make things that don't have to have this stuff in it," said Birnbaum, who was not involved in the report.

Today, Cava announced it will eliminate PFAS from its food packaging by mid-2021; Sweetgreen announced in March it would eliminate the chemicals by the end of the year. Freshii told CNN that it was transitioning to two sizes of PFAS-free pulp bowls by early 2021.

McDonald's Corporation sent the following statement: "We've eliminated significant subset classes of PFASs from McDonald's food packaging across the world. We know there is more progress to be made across the industry and we are exploring opportunities with our supplier partners to go further."

CNN reached out to the other two companies but did not receive a response before our publication deadline.

What are PFAS?

The PFAS chemicals are made up of a chain of linked carbon and fluorine atoms, which do not degrade in the environment.

"In fact, scientists are unable to estimate an environmental half-life for PFAS, which is the amount of time it takes 50% of the chemical to disappear," according to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

While two of the most ubiquitous PFAS -- the 8-carbon chain perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) -- were removed from consumer products in the US in the early 2000s, the industry has spawned many more: More than 4,700 types of PFAS existed in 2018, a number that rises as industry invents new forms.

PFAS chemicals are used in all sorts of products we purchase: Nonstick cookware, infection-resistant surgical gowns and drapes, cell phones, semi-conductors, commercial aircraft and low-emissions vehicles.

The chemicals are also used to make carpeting, clothing, furniture and food packaging resistant to stains, water and grease damage. Foods which contain a lot of grease -- such as burgers, fries and cookies -- are prime candidates for wrappers made with PFAS.

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"Maybe that's something that we all as consumers need to think about," Birnbaum said. "Is it more important to have PFAS wrappings on our food to prevent grease soaking through? Or do we just accept that as something that we deal with?"

The PFAS chemicals in food wrappers and containers are part of the newer generation, made with 4- or 6-carbon chains to replace the rejected 8-chain PFOA and PFOS versions.

However, newer forms appear to have many of the dangerous health effects as the older versions, say experts, leaving consumers and the environment still at risk.

"So they went to the shorter chain carbons, and you study them, and they do just about the same thing," Birnbaum said. "Why would we think that you can make a very minor change in a molecule you are manufacturing and the body wouldn't react in the same way?"

Studies also show the newer PFAS chemicals may migrate into food more readily than older forms.

"This is a whole pattern of what has been happening," Birnbaum added. "Some people call it the 'Wack-a-Mole' problem, others call it the chemical conveyor belt. We don't really require adequate safety testing before things are put on the market."

It's also hard to keep track of the substances in "the chemical Whack-a-Mole," Trasande added.

"It's not to say that there aren't others down the pike that may have the same kind of problems," he said. "Because we innovate our chemical structures and that may help get past the US Food and Drug Administration regulatory loophole and get usability for food contact."

Health dangers of PFAS

There is extensive evidence of the harm PFAS substances can do to the body, as well as to the environment. Research over the last decade has found exposure to PFAS to be associated with liver damage, immune disorders, cancer and endocrine disruption -- meaning they mimic or interfere with the body's natural hormone processes.

Endocrine disruptors -- such as the infamous pesticides DDT and dioxin, plastic additives Bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates -- join PFAS chemicals in being linked with developmental, reproductive, brain, immune and other problems, according to the National Institute of Environmental Sciences.

A major review, published in the *Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology* journal last month, lists studies linking endocrine-disrupting chemicals with semen damage and prostate cancer in men, breast cancer, polycystic ovarian syndrome and endometriosis in women, child and adult obesity and more.

PFAS have been detected in the blood of 97% of Americans, one 2015 report by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found.

The packaging continues to damage the environment and human health after its been discarded, contaminating drinking water, food and air. Even if a person avoids PFAS in their own home, evidence shows that these chemicals still enter the environment, experts say, where they can make their way back to people.

Many more examples



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This is not the first report to find such chemicals in our food packaging.

A 2017 study examined 400 samples of food wrappers, paperboard containers and beverage containers from fast food restaurants throughout the United States. Paper cups had no contamination, but 56% of dessert and bread wrappers, 38% of sandwich and burger wrappers and 20% of paperboard wrappers (the type used to hold french fries, for example) contained detectable levels of PFAS chemicals.

Over a third of the samples tested at levels far above what is considered to be acceptable, the study found.

In late 2018, Safer Chemicals Healthy Families and Toxic-Free Future released a report entitled "Take Out Toxics: PFAS Chemicals in Food Packaging," in which they found evidence of PFAS chemicals in nearly two-thirds of takeout containers made of paper, like those used at self-serve salad buffets and hot bars.

In response, Whole Foods became the first grocery chain in North America to publicly commit to remove PFAS from take-out containers and deli and bakery paper. Other brands, such as Trader Joe's, Panera Bread and Ahold Delhaize have made advances, but Mind the Store's latest retail ranking still gives 18 retailers an "F," including giants Burger King, McDonald's, Popeyes, Publix, Starbucks and Subway.

"The biggest reason why it's been slow going is not a lack of effort by these non-profit organizations, or a lack of concern by consumers, but because there is no requirement by the FDA to systematically test these products," Trasande said.

"They come to market without the kind of toxicology testing and pre-market testing for safety that we truly need."

Vote with pocketbook

What's to be done? As it turns out, consumers have a lot of clout when it comes to voting with their pocketbooks.

"When the consumer pushes back, it makes a difference," Birnbaum said. "For example, Home Depot announced last year they were no longer going to sell stain-resistant carpeting because they were getting push back from buyers."

"The same happened with flame retardants in mattresses, about 10 or 15 years ago, when people said I don't want to find flame retardant in my mattress," she added. "And the reason the FDA finally banned BPA from baby bottles and sippy cups was because new mothers were saying, 'I don't want BPA near my baby,' and refusing to buy things with it."

Trasande agrees: "The few data that have been published have driven relatively rapid change. I remember when one of the reports came out about two supermarket chains with their buffet-style

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food packaging. And literally weeks later on Instagram and Facebook, they announced they had swapped out their materials for PFAS-free.

"We know that companies respond to consumer concerns because they're tied to profit margin and market share," Trasande said.

States have been on the front line of pushing for change. The states of Washington and Maine, and the cities of Berkley and San Francisco banned PFAS in paper food packaging a few years ago. New York is in the process of banning it this year. Two Congressional representatives introduced the Keep Food Containers Safe from PFAS Act last year, but no action has been taken.

Last week the FDA announced a voluntary agreement with three paper manufacturers, saying they will start phasing out some synthetic chemicals used in food packaging materials over the next three to five years. The FDA also noted that in 2019 a fourth manufacturer stopped their sales of certain PFAS products in the US market.

These moves come on the heels of an FDA analysis from earlier this year that found certain PFAS chemicals used in food packaging could be found in drinking water and one last year finding the chemicals were persistent in human diets.

More needs to be done, say experts, which requires educating the public on the dangers of PFAS chemicals to both human health and the environment.

"I don't think people want necessarily chemicals in their food that are going to get into their body and maybe cause health effects or last a long, long time in the environment," Birnbaum said. "But I don't think people know that."



The Apo Myna is one of the threatened bird species found in EDC's geothermal site in Mt. Apo, Mindanao.

'Green' energy powers biodiversity

(Philstar.com) - August 7, 2020 - 12:17pm

MANILA, Philippines – For Dr. Juan Carlos T. Gonzalez, a professor at the University of the Philippines-Los Baños (UPLB) and head of the UPLB Museum of Natural History, the current COVID-19 pandemic is a public health crisis that is also a lesson on biodiversity — how human activities have consequences on the natural environment and vice versa.

He recently spoke on the topic at length during an online learning session organized by geothermal energy leader Energy Development Corporation (EDC) in line with Philippine Environment Month in June. The local annual commemoration also coincides with the global observance of World Environment Day every June 5, Philippine Eagle Week every June 6 to 10, and National Arbor Day every June 25.

Dr. Gonzalez defined biodiversity as the observed number of species in a particular geographic location. As such, the study of endemism or naturally occurring species in a location such as an island, region or country is also important to further understand and appreciate biodiversity, as well as to take steps to protect it.

As a bird expert or ornithologist, Dr. Gonzalez highlighted in particular the impressive biodiversity of birds in the country. According to the latest 2019 checklist, there are 700 species recorded with 241 of them found only in the Philippines, with the Mindanao region possessing the highest rate of endemism. Interestingly, new species of birds continue to be discovered, such as the Cebu Hawk Owl in 2012 and the Sierra Madre Ground Warbler in 2013.

For Dr. Gonzalez, such records are not only exciting but also an indicator of the continuously evolving ecosystem and the need for humans to know more about the creatures that they coexist with. As such, protecting biodiversity is crucial, and this can be achieved by planting more trees, vegetation and flowering plants to encourage pollination.

Trees for the future

This is where endemism comes into play. “For the longest time, we have been reforesting using non-native species,” he said. These trees, being unsuitable for the location they are planted in, are unable to thrive and serve their purpose of being home to other endemic flora and fauna. In some instances, such reforestation measures end up being more harmful than beneficial.

'Green' energy powers biodiversity

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Initiatives like EDC's BINHI greening program have been addressing such needs and ensuring that endemic tree species are propagated and nurtured across the country. Started in 2008, reforestation is the chosen flagship social investment initiative of the geothermal energy company because forest cover plays an integral role in maintaining water beneath the earth's surface, which is converted by natural heat into steam and then utilized to generate electricity.

To date, BINHI has successfully identified and documented 96 threatened species of native Philippine trees and successfully planted in all 177 partner organizations across the country.

EDC also conducted forest restoration with over 6.5 million of native tree seedlings covering nearly 10,000 hectares of land. EDC's geothermal energy production sites in Leyte, Bicol, Negros island, and at Mt. Apo in Mindanao are the primary BINHI restoration locations.

Biodiversity takes flight

The results of an almost decade-long Biodiversity Conservation and Monitoring Program (BCMP) carried out in partnership with the University of the Philippines-Diliman's Institute of Biology in these geothermal sites further illustrate the impact of endemic trees to biodiversity, particularly among birds and flying mammals such as bats. Dr. Gonzalez noted that at least 300 species of birds have been documented to be thriving in these locations, representing about 43% of the total bird species in the country.

Some 169 bird species are Philippine-endemic, which represents nearly 71% of the total endemic species in the country. Most importantly, a total of 59 threatened bird species were recorded in these geothermal sites, including the critically endangered Philippine Eagle. Other important sightings that Dr. Gonzalez noted were the Visayan Tarictic Hornbill in Negros and the Apo Myna in Mindanao, among many other precious birds.

According to Dr. Gonzalez, the BINHI forests are "an amazing laboratory" where scientists such as him are not only able to study species but also "understand the relationships and patterns that govern our own anthropogenic disturbances," or human activities that impact the environment. These virtual sanctuaries also show that renewable energy such as geothermal are the hope for a future where biodiversity can continue to take flight alongside human progress and modern development.

PH COVID-19 cases top 122,000 with 3,379 new infections

By [CNN Philippines Staff](#)

Published Aug 7, 2020 4:20:56 PM



The country's COVID-19 cases topped 122,000 after recording 3,379 more infections, the Department of Health said Friday. (FILE PHOTO)

Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, August 7) — The country's COVID-19 cases topped 122,000 after recording 3,379 more infections, the Department of Health said Friday.

The agency said the tally has reached 122,754 with 53,734 active cases or currently ill patients. From the active cases, 91.4 percent have mild symptoms, 7.3 percent have no symptoms, 0.7 percent are severe cases and 0.5 percent are in critical condition, the department noted.

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The DOH said Metro Manila recorded the highest number of new infections with 1,846 more cases, followed by Rizal with 314, Laguna with 276, Cavite with 145 and Quezon with 66 newly infected residents.

Meanwhile, another 96 persons got well, raising the number of recoveries to 66,852. The death toll also increased to 2,168 after 24 more succumbed to the disease, the agency said.

Among the newly reported deaths, two died in March, one in April, eight in May, eight in June, four in July and one in August, the case bulletin detailed.

The Department of Foreign Affairs also announced 18 new cases among Filipinos abroad with the total now reaching 9,710 in 72 countries. Some 19 also recovered while another person died, bringing total recoveries to 5,756 and the death toll to 703, DFA said.

Global virus cases top 19 mn as Europe tightens curbs

posted August 07, 2020 at 08:30 am

by [AFP and Kit Holden](#)

Coronavirus cases worldwide passed 19 million Thursday, as European nations imposed new travel restrictions and containment measures with fears growing over a second wave of infections.



An employee wears protective gear while working at the Azcapotzalco crematorium in Mexico City, on August 6, 2020, amid the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic (Photo by PEDRO PARDO / AFP)

The global figure, compiled by AFP from official sources at 2300 GMT, was driven by surges in Latin America and India -- and a new milestone in Africa as the continent hit one million cases.

Global deaths from the pandemic have topped 700,000, and Europe remains the hardest-hit region worldwide with more than 200,000 fatalities since the virus first emerged in China late last year.

More than half of Africa's cases are in South Africa, which has the fifth highest number of infections in the world, after the US, Brazil, India and Russia.

Nevertheless the African continent remains one of the least affected, according to the official figures, with only Oceania registering fewer COVID-19 cases.

As governments across the globe struggle to salvage economies ravaged by months of lockdown, many have been forced to look at new measures to curb outbreaks of COVID-19 since they lifted initial containment orders.

In Australia, the second-largest city Melbourne entered the country's toughest lockdown yet on Thursday, closing non-essential businesses and requiring hundreds of thousands more people to stay home.

The pandemic has killed at least 712,315 people worldwide with the United States recording the most deaths with almost 160,000, followed by Brazil with nearly 100,000. Globally, 40 percent of all cases have been recorded in the two countries.

Germany is the latest to introduce mandatory tests for travellers returning from designated risk zones, starting on Saturday, as fears grow over rising case numbers blamed on summer holidays and local outbreaks.

Germany's list of "risk zones" currently includes most non-EU countries, as well as certain provinces in Belgium and Spain.

Neighbouring Austria on Thursday announced it would issue a travel warning for mainland Spain, becoming the latest country to do so amid a rise in new coronavirus cases in the fellow EU member.

Global virus cases top 19 mn as Europe tightens curbs

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Finland also introduced new controls on arrivals from some EU countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands and Andorra, putting a stop to tourists arriving from there and imposing a 14-day quarantine on other returnees.

"The situation is extremely delicate," the health ministry's strategic director Liisa-Maria Voipio-Pulkki said, adding that "some sort of second stage has begun."

"Whether we can expect a smaller wave or a larger wave depends on how we respond."

Britain has reimposed quarantine for travelers from Belgium, Andorra and the Bahamas.

Norway announced Thursday that France would be considered a red zone due to the resurgence of coronavirus cases there, meaning all travellers arriving from France face a mandatory ten-day quarantine.

Switzerland, Monaco and the Czech Republic were also hit with similar restrictions, as well as two Swedish regions, the Norwegian foreign affairs ministry said.

"The infectious situation can change quickly, as can the restrictions," Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soreide said.

The United States bucked the trend despite its own soaring death toll, lifting a blanket warning against all foreign travel.

"Health and safety conditions (are) improving in some countries and potentially deteriorating in others," the State Department said in a statement.

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Duterte, IATF to meet in Davao City on Aug. 10

By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos August 7, 2020, 5:34 pm



(Presidential Photo)

MANILA – President Rodrigo Duterte’s next meeting with select members of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Diseases (IATF-EID) is scheduled in Davao City on August 10, Malacañang said on Friday.

The meeting would be held barely a week before the lapse of the quarantine classifications in the country.

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said Duterte’s public address, which is usually delivered during his meeting with IATF-EID, is expected to be aired on television on Monday.

“Ang susunod pong broadcast natin ay sa siyudad ng Davao. Magkakaroon po ng pagpupulong ang Presidente kasama po ang ilang mga piling miyembro ng IATF sa araw ng Lunes (Our next broadcast is from Davao City. The President will meet with select IATF members on Monday),” Roque said in a virtual presser.

Roque did not mention the meeting’s agenda and whether the new quarantine classifications would be discussed.

On July 30, Duterte announced his decision to downgrade the quarantine status in Cebu City to a less restrictive general community quarantine (GCQ) from a more stringent modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ).

Apart from Cebu City, Duterte also initially imposed GCQ in Metro Manila and the provinces of Bulacan, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, and Rizal from August 1 to 15.

Also under GCQ are Talisay City, Minglanilla, and Consolacion in Cebu province.

However, Duterte decided on August 2 to place Metro Manila and the provinces of Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna, and Rizal under MECQ from Aug. 4 to 18 following the medical workers’ call for a “timeout” to prevent the collapse of the country’s healthcare system amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

Modified GCQ was implemented in the rest of the country until August 15. **(PNA)**

The 1987 Constitution during these pandemic times

Published August 7, 2020, 11:10 PM

[by Dr. Florangel Rosario Braid](#)

PAGBABAGO



Has the pandemic exacerbated key constitutional issues? How has COVID-19 affected the performance of the Constitution? And how can we keep the Charter working during emergency periods? These were some of the questions raised during the webinar organized by the UP Political Science Department and the Center for Integrative Studies (CIDS), together with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) last Thursday.

Early this year, UP and CIDS published the Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Constitution which showed that most of the technical requirements of the Charter were met. These include holding elections, and enacting laws. However, in terms of substantial compliance or meeting the five goals of democratization; decentralization, social justice, human rights, and gender equality; peace and conflict resolution; and economic development, the achievement was limited.

The assessment by UP political science professors – Dr. Maria Ela Atienza, Dr. Aries Arugay, Dr. Jan Robert Go, Dr. Rogelio Alicor Pano, and Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco, and moderated by Ms. Amada Cats-Baril, IDEA's Constitutional Building Processes Adviser for Asia, focused on electoral institutions, legislative-executive relations, judiciary, accountability institutions, local governments, rights, security sectors, economy and labor, citizenship and equality

The assessment methodology utilized is compliance with the Constitution in a “thin” or “thick” sense, “thin” referring to compliance with mandates such as passing legislation or formulating policies and “thick” as a more complex process as it requires qualitative assessment on whether the Constitution has created a stable system of governance or equality between citizens, deepened democracy, or transformed conflict.”

The findings showed only “*thin*” compliance with internal criteria used in performance assessment. Many of the technical requirements were met in terms of setting up mandated institutions, enacting necessary laws and actions. However, “*thick*” or substantial compliance in the five goals noted above were limited.

The panelists cited examples of government performance in response to COVID, underscoring positive innovations that showed adherence and support to the mandates of the Constitution on one hand, and limitations, on the other. Trends and warning signals needing response were likewise cited. Here are some of the assessment findings:

The 1987 Constitution during these pandemic times Page 2/2

- Lack of proactive and prevented response to the pandemic. Examples given were “government’s downplaying of COVID-19, and slow response as it had taken a month before a state of calamity was declared.
- Positives include “government was able to set up facilities, and improvements in testing, although not enough.”
- Limitations – “lifting of strict lockdown resulted in the rise of cases
- On legislative-executive relations, there was “thin” compliance in terms of designing institutions that would bring about greater oversight powers to the legislative branch in pursuit of separation of powers. Political parties and pork-barrel politics inhibited strong and independent legislature. COVID-19 gave the executive branch “immense agenda-setting powers” over Congress and further weakening of separation of powers.
- Fast growth of emergency powers. Citing public emergencies, the President was allowed to certify bills as urgent. In fact he was allowed 30 emergency powers to cushion the economic impact of the pandemic. But this, as some legal experts noted, could “slide into a permanent and unconstitutional regime.”
- In the Judiciary, legal proceedings were affected but alternatives such as video-conferencing and e-filing of complaints were made possible through information technology.
- Challenges in the electoral process – improving voter registration. addressing postponement of plebiscites and barangay election; dealing with issues of political dynasties and party-list system, and direct democracy through initiative and referendum such as the nationwide signature petition.
- On economic provisions, ensuring equitable access of the marginalized and the vulnerable, some of the worst hit during the pandemic.
- The Bayanihan Act allowed flexible work arrangements, hazard pay, and rental moratorium and other social amelioration privileges

Small businesses and the middle class were, however, left out.

- The healthcare system was overwhelmed. There was poor telecom infrastructure inadequate Internet access and learning resources for blended learning.
- While decentralization is a desired objective, the pandemic with the emergency powers given to the President had made top-down decision-making imperative.

Documenting these processes in the social, economic, and political life of the nation as they relate to the performance of our Constitution during these times is a significant first step. As a panelist noted, “Democracy cannot be suspended because of the pandemic.”

<https://mb.com.ph/2020/08/07/the-1987-constitution-during-these-pandemic-times/>

Metro Manila, 5 probinsya babayuhin ng habagat



August 7, 2020 @ 6:41 PM 13 hours ago

Manila, Philippines – Patuloy pa ring makararanas ng pag-ulan ang Metro Manila, Bataan, Zambales, CALABARZON, MIMAROPA, and Western Visayas dulot ng Southwest Monsoon o Habagat hanggang Sabado, Agosto 8, batay sa tala ng PAGASA.

Sa kanilang 24-hour forecast ng ahensya, ibinabala nito ang posibleng flash floods at landslides dahil katamtaman hanggang sa malalakas na buhos ng ulat.

Pinagsamang Habagat at Low Pressure Area naman ang iiral at magpapa-ulan sa Pangasinan, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, nalalabing bahagi ng Central Luzon, Bicol Region, nalalabing bahagi ng Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, BARMM, at Northern Mindanao.

Huling namataan ang LPA sa layong 455 kilometero silangan ng Baler, Aurora.

Maulap na papawirin naman na may kasamang isolated shower ang iiral sa nalalabing bahagi ng Luzon at Mindanao dulot pa rin ng Habagat at localized thunderstorms.

Pinapaalalahanan ang mga residenteng nasa mababang lugar at kabundukan na mag-ingat dahil sa posibleng pagbaha at pagguho ng lupa dulot ng mga pag-ulan. RNT/LF



PAGASA: Habagat to bring monsoon rains over Metro Manila, 5 other areas

Published August 7, 2020 4:51pm

Updated August 7, 2020 8:36pm

The Southwest Monsoon is expected to bring monsoon rains over Metro Manila, Bataan, Zambales, CALABARZON, MIMAROPA, and Western Visayas on Saturday, according to PAGASA.

In its [24-hour forecast on Friday](#), the weather agency warned of possible flash floods or landslides due to moderate with, at times, heavy rains.

Occasional rains may also prevail over Pangasinan, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, the rest of Central Luzon, Bicol Region, the rest of Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, BARMM, and Northern Mindanao due to the southwest monsoon and the trough of a low pressure (LPA) area.

Flash floods and landslides are also possible.

At 3 p.m. on Friday, the LPA was estimated at 455 kilometer east of Baler, Aurora.

According to GMA's resident meteorologist Nathaniel "Mang Tani" Cruz's report in "24 Oras," the LPA has a high chance of intensifying into a storm in the following days as its circulation develops.

The storm will be called "Enteng." Cruz said the LPA is already considered a storm by the Japan Meteorological Agency.

Meanwhile, the southwest monsoon and localized thunderstorms are also expected to bring partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers over the rest of Luzon and Mindanao.

Affected residents are warned of possible flash floods or landslides during severe thunderstorms.

Meanwhile, the PAGASA synoptic station at the Science Garden, Quezon City recorded a minimum temperature of 24°C at 6 a.m. and a maximum temperature of 31.8°C at 1:50 p.m. — Joahna Lei Casilao/RSJ, GMA News

Ilang parte ng Metro Manila, binaha dahil LPA at habagat

By [Bombo Dennis Jamito](#)

-August 7, 2020 | 6:00 PM

Mas malawak na lugar pa ang inaasahang uulanin at babahain sa mga susunod na araw dahil sa pagkilos ng binabantayang low pressure area (LPA) sa Luzon.

Huling namataan ang LPA sa layong 455 km sa silangan ng Baler, Aurora.

Habang habagat naman ang nagdadala ng ulan sa Central at Southern Luzon, Visayas at Mindanao.

Nitong Biyernes ng hapon, binaha ang ilang parte ng Metro Manila dahil sa biglaan at malakas na ulan.

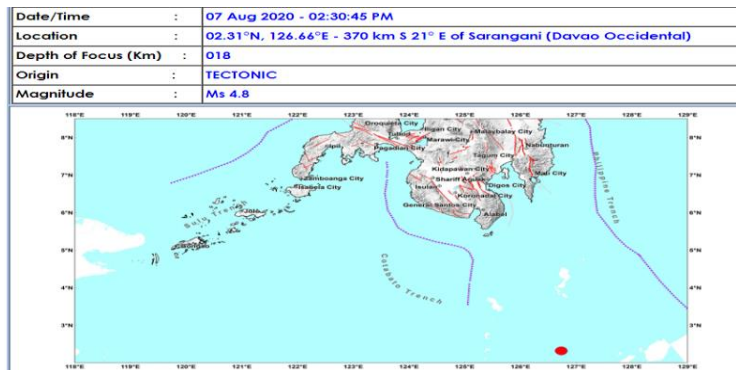
Partikular na naapektuhan ng baha ang Brgy. Pinyahan sa Quezon City, maging sa Mother Ignacia at Samar streets.

Habang umabot hanggang sa 20 sentimetro ang taas ng tubig sa Gate 3 ng Camp Aguinaldo na nasa kahabaan ng EDSA.

Bumigat din ang daloy ng trapiko sa iba pang mga lansangan dahil sa zero visibility, dulot ng malakas na pagbuhos ng ulan.

Sarangani, Davao Occidental niyanig ng magnitude 4.8 na lindol

By Dona Dominguez-Cargullo August 07, 2020 - 03:04 PM



Niyanig ng magnitude 4.8 na lindol ang lalawigan ng Davao Occidental.

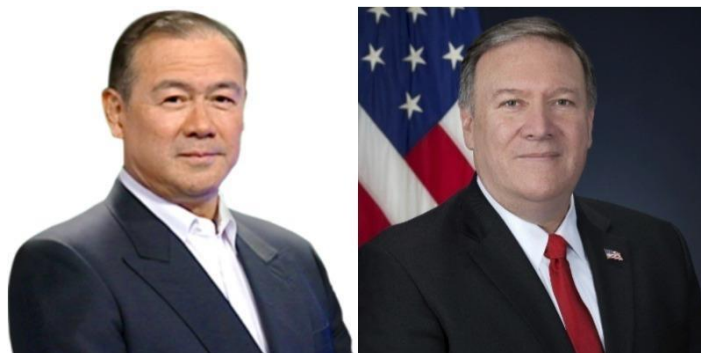
Ayon sa Phivolcs, naitala ang pagyanig sa 370 kilometers southeast ng bayan ng Sarangani alas 2:30 ng hapon ng Biyernes (August 7).

May lalim na 18 kilometers at tectonic ang origin ng pagyanig.

Wala namang naitalang intensities bunsod ng lindol.

Hindi rin ito inaasahang magdudulot ng pinsala at aftershocks.

Read more: <https://radyo.inquirer.net/258266/sarangani-davao-occidental-niyanig-ng-magnitude-4-8-na-lindol-2#ixzz6UTRjdxQ>



Locsin, Pompeo hold talks on South China Sea

Published August 7, 2020 9:32am

Updated August 7, 2020 10:08am

By [MICHAELA DEL CALLAR/](#)

Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. and US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo held talks on the South China issue as both countries reaffirm their "strong" alliance amid China's increased military presence in the disputed waters.

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Pompeo, in a readout of his call to Locsin on Thursday, Aug. 6 (Friday, Aug. 7 in Manila), discussed "the recent change in US policy on maritime claims in the South China Sea and US support for Southeast Asian coastal states upholding their sovereign rights and interests consistent with international law."

He also talked about "opportunities for further US-Philippine maritime cooperation" even as President Rodrigo Duterte barred the country's participation in any maritime drills in the South China Sea - a move lauded by Beijing.

The two secretaries, the statement said, "also discussed the strong economic, security, and people-to-people ties that bind our two countries."

The US last month backed Southeast Asian nations locked in territorial disputes with China, saying it will not allow the Asian superpower to rule and control the resource-rich South China Sea.

Australia followed suit, rejecting Beijing's claims over the waters and supporting the 2016 award of the Arbitral Tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands that heard the case brought by the Philippines against China.

China, which considers the sea disputes a purely Asian issue, is opposed to any foreign intervention, particularly the US.

Although Washington is not a party to the disputes, it has declared that it is in its national interest to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight in the contested waters where the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan, and China have overlapping claims.

Over the years, China, which insisted on historical claim over nearly the entire South China Sea, has expanded its presence in the waters, turning several former reefs into artificial islands with military facilities, runways and surface to air missiles.

Locsin, Pompeo hold talks on South China Sea Page 2/2

Duterte, during his fifth State of the Nation Address, said he was [inutile](#) and cannot risk waging war over the South China Sea dispute, stressing China was "in possession of the property."

"Alam mo, unless we are prepared to go to war, I would suggest that we better just call off and treat this as a diplomatic endeavor. China is claiming it, we are claiming it. China has the arms, we do not have it. So, it's simple as that, they are in possession of the property," he said.

Critics [denounced](#) Duterte's "cowardice" and defeatist tone on the issue.

Meanwhile, the Philippine government in June also postponed the abrogation of its Visiting Forces Agreement with the US "in light of political and other developments in the region."

The said treaty termination has been unilaterally decided by Duterte in February following the US visa cancellation of his close ally, Senator Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa.— with Dona Magsino/RSJ/KBK, GMA News

Protecting Fuga islands from China very important to PH: Enrile

ABS-CBN News

Posted at Aug 08 2020 02:43 AM

MANILA - "Protect the Fuga island group."

This was the call of former senator and defense minister Juan Ponce Enrile on Friday, hours after China lauded the Duterte administration for skipping international maritime drills in the West Philippine Sea.

- [China praises Duterte administration for skipping international maritime drills in West PH Sea](#)

Enrile said in a statement that shielding the Fuga island group, which is located 30 kilometers off the northern coast of Luzon, "is very important and strategic to the national security of the Philippines."

"It is like a dagger pointed at the very heart of the country. If it falls into the hands of a foreign power with immense global ambition to achieve and great national interest to preserve, it will certainly cause the country a very serious and dangerous security problem," he said.

"We must, therefore, never allow the Fuga island group to fall in the hands of or to be controlled by any foreign power, directly or indirectly, and most especially a foreign power like red China."

The Fuga island group is composed of 3 islands, namely Fuga, Barit and Mabbag, all of which are part of Aparri town, Cagayan.

Fuga is the largest and longest of the islands, measuring about 10,000 hectares in flat land, and is around 20 kilometers long and 5 km wide. Barit is around 900 hectares in area, its terrain "rugged with a green cover." Mabbag is the smallest of the islands. Entirely flat, it has an area of around 300 hectares.

Enrile said that if China, one of foreign powers that Manila is disputing with on the West Philippine Sea, was to seize the islands, it would "surely" use them as naval and air force bases to "complement" its military base in Hainan province and its man-made fortified artificial islands in the West Philippine Sea.

"That would immensely enable red China to control that sea lane in South China Sea. And should that happen, it would certainly hurt us, hurt Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and also the United States. Almost one-third of total global trade passes through that sea lane," Enrile said.

The United States earlier branded China's claims in the West Philippine Sea as illegal, ramping up support for Southeast Asian nations.

- [Raising stakes, US brands China claims in South China Sea as illegal](#)

Enrile pointed out if China were to occupy the Fuga islands, it would "dominate" the overlapping maritime borders between the Philippines and Taiwan in the Balintang Channel off Batanes and it "would pose a very serious strategic problem for us."

Protecting Fuga islands from China very important to PH: Enrile

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"In addition, it would also give the Chinese Liberation Army a convenient logistic base to support whatever activity red China has in mind to do in the area of Benham Rise or Philippine Rise, which is only 350 kilometers away to the east from the Fuga island group," he said.

"Finally, with red China on the Fuga island group, whether directly or indirectly, those three islands could be used to politically subvert and destabilize our society or to supply weapons to strengthen rebel groups in the country."

Enrile said that he has no qualms against China but was "simply doing my duty to my country" in reminding the Philippines government to protect the Fuga islands from occupying foreign forces.

"I am simply warning my countrymen to be very alert and careful in dealing with other nations and peoples whose national or personal interests my differ from the national interests of my own native land."

The Philippine Navy last year said it plans to put up a station in Fuga Island, which drew attention after it was announced that Chinese businessmen secured a deal with the Cagayan Economic Zone Authority (CEZA) to turn the island into an electronic and online "smart city."

The Navy expressed concern about the deal, saying it could compromise national security.

- [Gov't eyes naval station in Fuga Island amid China 'smart city' plan](#)

Climate change to bring longer droughts in Europe — study

[Agence France-Presse](#) / 04:19 PM August 07, 2020



The intense drought in Europe from 2018 to 2019 was the first two-year dry period in 250 years, the study found. Image: AFP/dpa/Patrick Pleul

Punishing two-year droughts like the record-breaking one that gripped Central Europe from 2018 to 2019 could become much more frequent if the region fails to curb greenhouse gas emissions, researchers said Thursday, affecting huge swathes of its cultivated land.

The five hottest years in recorded history have occurred in the last five years.

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This extreme heat was exacerbated in 2018 and 2019 by two consecutive summers of drought that affected more than half of Central Europe, according to a new study published in the Nature journal Scientific Reports.

Researchers in Germany and the Czech Republic used data going back to 1766 to conclude the drought was the largest-scale and most severe dry spell ever recorded.

“The observational record suggests that the ongoing 2018 to 2019 European drought event is unprecedented in the last 250 years, with substantial implications for vegetation health,” the study said.

Researchers then sought to estimate whether prolonged droughts would become more frequent in the future by using global climate change models.

Under a scenario where greenhouse gas emissions continue their inexorable rise, the researchers predicted that the number of extreme two-year droughts will increase sevenfold in Europe in the second half of this century.

“This projection also suggested that drought-affected cropland areas across Central Europe will nearly double,” said co-author Rohini Kumar, of the UFZ-Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, in Leipzig.

This would result in a total of 40 million hectares of cultivated land affected — equivalent to 60% of all crop areas in the region.

When researchers modeled for moderate emissions, the predicted number of two-year droughts halved compared to the worst-case scenario, while the area expected to be hit by the drought also reduced.

Kumar said this suggests a reduction in emissions could lower the risk of these damaging dry periods.

Threat to agriculture



The five hottest years in recorded history have occurred in the last five years. Image: AFP/Loic Venance

The researcher said a two-year dry period presents a far greater threat to vegetation than the single-summer droughts of previous years because the land cannot recover as quickly.

He said around a fifth of the Central European region had recorded poor vegetation health in the last two years.

“Thus, it is with the utmost urgency that we need to recognize the importance of these persevering consecutive year events, and to develop a holistic framework to model the risk,” he added.

The study defined Central Europe as including parts of Germany, France, Poland, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, as well as the Czech Republic, Belgium, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia.

Over 34% of the total land area in the region is extensively used for agricultural purposes, it said.

The 2015 Paris climate deal commits nations to capping temperature rises to “well-below” 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels and to strive for a 1.5 degrees Celsius limit if at all possible.

With just 1 degree Celsius of warming so far, Earth is already buffeted by record-breaking droughts, wildfires and superstorms made more potent by rising sea levels.

To keep in line with the 1.5 degrees Celsius target, the United Nations says global emissions must fall by 7.6% every year this decade. **IB**

Readmore: <https://technology.inquirer.net/102873/climate-change-to-bring-longer-droughts-in-europe-study#ixzz6USxjE6nT>

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The bioaerosols controversy: From public health to the environment

Covid-19 is focusing attention on the risks of aerosols containing microorganisms or biological material.



Pedestrians, most of who wear face masks, walk on a street in heavy smog in Shenyang city, northeast China's Liaoning province. Image: [Chinaimages, CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

By Gao Baiyu, China Dialogue

Aug. 7, 2020

In early July, over 200 scientists from 32 countries [called](#) for the medical community and national and international bodies to take airborne transmission of Covid-19 seriously. Research shows, they said, “beyond any reasonable doubt” that breathing, talking and coughing releases microdroplets that remain in the air, and Covid-19 particles carried in those microdroplets could infect people several metres distant.

They called for measures to prevent such transmission, and said that with lockdown policies ending, an inadequate understanding of transmission routes among governments and public health bodies could have grave consequences.



[CSR](#)

The bioaerosols controversy: From public health to the environment

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How can businesses raise the bar of environmental sanitation standards beyond the pandemic?

The WHO then [acknowledged](#) for the first time the possibility of airborne transmission of the coronavirus, saying it was reevaluating the evidence and planned to update its prevention guidelines.

Yao Maosheng of the Bioaerosol Laboratory at Peking University's College of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, [told](#) the media that airborne transmission has been widely discussed in China, where it is referred to as aerosol transmission.

An aerosol is a persistent suspension of airborne particles less than 100 micrometres in size – smog and fog are both examples. Aerosols containing microorganisms or biological material such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, pollen and animal proteins are referred to as bioaerosols.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing the Covid-19 disease, with a diameter of less than 0.1 micrometres, can be transmitted through the air when carried on an aerosol of dust or droplets. Aerosols are varied and present a wide range of risks – both epidemiological and environmental.

The airborne transmission debate

In Europe and the US a lot of [public discussion](#) has focused on whether wearing a mask in public is necessary to limit the possibility of airborne transmission of Covid-19. The [WHO](#), US [CDC](#) and the [UK government](#) said there was no need to wear a mask unless you were unwell.

But the possibility of asymptomatic carriers and transmission during the virus's incubation period soon drew attention, while [new research](#) indicated that in poorly ventilated spaces the virus could remain suspended in the air for hours and travel significant distances. This all supported those advocating mask-wearing, and health authorities gradually moved to recommend the use of masks or other face coverings.

This was a debate that China had already had. In [guidelines](#) advising the public on how to prevent the spread of the virus published in late January, the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention listed three transmission routes: airborne transmission; close contact with an infected person; and transferring infected droplets via hands from surfaces to eyes, nose or mouth.

Some said there was no conclusive evidence for airborne transmission while others said it was safer to assume there was. Regardless, airborne transmission was included in diagnosis and treatment guidelines issued later, but only as a possibility under certain circumstances.

An unusual cluster of SARS cases in a Hong Kong apartment block, the Amoy Gardens, during the 2003 outbreak were referred to as one reason for caution around airborne transmission.

An [investigation](#) found the cluster may have been caused when the virus entered the sewer system of the building, became attached to droplets or particles forming aerosols, before finding its way into apartments via leaky pipes and dried-up U-bends. Although there is no conclusive evidence this was the route of transmission, it is a reasonable suspicion and should be taken seriously.

The bioaerosols controversy: From public health to the environment

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During an 8 February press conference on the coronavirus epidemic, one Shanghai official said the virus could spread by airborne transmission. Although no evidence for this was offered, it did lead to a general belief that this had been confirmed.

Experts quickly [pointed out](#) a lack of conclusive evidence, but with the virus spreading quickly many people thought it was better to be cautious than await more evidence. A rapid increase in mask production made the debate less important and it was soon normal to wear a mask in public.

Chinese researchers have tried to find evidence of airborne transmission of the novel coronavirus. In early June, Yao Maosheng and his team published a preprint [paper](#) (a paper not yet peer reviewed and officially published) on medRxiv, which found normal respiration was an important source in the spread of the virus, alongside coughing and sneezing.

A Covid-19 patient could exhale millions of virus particles every hour, in droplets smaller than 2.5 micrometres – smaller than those emitted by coughs and sneezes and so able to remain airborne for longer. This, the researchers said, explained why asymptomatic carriers of the virus, who did not cough or sneeze, could still infect others.

They wrote: “Evidences from our work show that exhaled breath emission may well be the most significant SARS-CoV-2 shedding mechanism, which could have contributed largely to the observed cluster infections and the ongoing pandemic.”

Bioaerosols – an environmental issue

While the epidemic has raised concerns about aerosols, people in China were already familiar with the issue because of [problems with smog](#), although the term bioaerosol was not much used.

In 2014, a group from Tsinghua University [found](#) 1,300 types of microorganism in Beijing’s smog although the majority were found to be harmless and very few could cause disease. In 2016, the international journal *Microbiome* published [research](#) finding antibiotic resistant genes in Beijing’s smog, causing public concern and leading experts to offer [clarifications](#): finding the gene did not mean live antibiotic resistant bacteria had been found, and even live bacteria may not cause disease – and so there was no need for panic.

And perhaps there wasn’t, but according to a [literature review](#) published by Yao and others in 2018, livestock farms, wastewater treatment plants and hospitals can all release antibiotic resistant genes into the air, and those genes could be passed on to other bacteria when aerosols from different sources mix, creating a potential health risk.

Yao told China Dialogue that they are currently looking at issues arising from these genes: “Antibiotic resistant genes spread very quickly in the air, and the development of new drugs can’t keep up with the speed at which bacteria acquire resistance via pollution.”

In 2018, Yao told Science and Technology Daily that bioaerosols are more easily absorbed into the body than chemicals and can, in certain conditions, breed, meaning there is no safe threshold for exposure. Research shows that fungi commonly found in the air such as penicillium, aspergillus and sporothrix can all produce allergens and cause allergic respiratory diseases.

The bioaerosols controversy: From public health to the environment

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Exposure to bioaerosols also causes blood pressure to rise in healthy people, and irreversible loss of lung function. Other research has found bioaerosols are denser on smoggy days, increasing the health risks.

And sometimes bioaerosols can have more direct health consequences. Last November almost 100 employees at a veterinary institute in the northwest province of Gansu caught [brucellosis](#).

An [investigation](#) identified the source: a vaccination plant upwind of the institute was releasing an infected bioaerosol, which the staff had breathed in.

[Research](#) has found that when controlling for smoking, workers in the meat and livestock sectors have a higher risk from lung cancer – possibly from long-term exposure to high levels of bioaerosols. Other research shows the microorganisms in bioaerosols can affect the particulate matter in the atmosphere, changing the properties of allergens and promoting the development of allergies.

All this means bioaerosols are both a public health issue and an environmental issue, and that rapid bioaerosol monitoring and alerts are necessary.

Monitoring problems

The coronavirus pandemic means there is public and scientific interest in monitoring bioaerosols.

On 8 February, as China began a belated return to the cities after an extended Chinese New Year break, Chinese NGO Toxics Free Corps joined with other green NGOs including Natural Field and the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation to issue an [urgent call](#) for monitoring and publication of virus levels in the air at busy locations, in order to prevent airborne transmission.

But China Dialogue has learned that while monitors were installed in some hospital wards and immigration halls, the only monitoring at transportation hubs was in Shenzhen, where the local disease control centre carried out [monitoring](#) at train and bus stations. According to Mao Da, founder of the Toxics Free Corps, the joint call did result in one member of the Qinhuangdao people's political consultative committee suggesting monitoring, but no more.

Yao Maosheng also pointed out that hospitals, livestock farms, landfill sites and water treatment plants are all key sources of bioaerosols, but there is no monitoring there of disease-causing bacteria or allergens.

Yao explained that this is due to difficulties with such monitoring. Microorganisms are not like chemicals – they are more varied, even including as-yet unidentified species. Countries that do carry out monitoring, such as France, only check for allergens.

Currently, China does not have any suitable methods for monitoring bioaerosols. During the monitoring in Shenzhen a traditional approach using a buffer solution to absorb viruses from the air for later laboratory analysis was used. This was called into question online as being too slow. [Equipment](#) developed by Yao and his team can detect flu viruses such as H₃N₂, H₁N₁ and H₅N₁, but specific modules need to be developed for other viruses.

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Bacteria, another important constituent of bioaerosols, are most often detected with ultraviolet lights. Yao told China Dialogue that this method is cheap but has problems: it can cause false positives where chemical particles are identified as bacteria, does not identify a specific type of bacteria, and can suffer interference from the background environment. His lab is working on a new method that will be more accurate, but require expensive reagents and professional maintenance. He sees an urgent need for a fast and sensitive monitoring method that can identify a wide range of bacteria.

Basic research overlooked

There are many challenges facing research into bioaerosols. Yao told China Dialogue that the field requires inter-disciplinary knowledge. “But usually, electronic engineers don’t understand microorganisms, people working on detecting microorganisms don’t understand environmental issues, and atmospheric scientists don’t know anything about viruses,” he said.

Another issue is the pursuit of higher “impact factor” within academic publishing, and a lack of state interest in some fields.

Deng Weiwei, a professor at Southern University of Science and Technology’s Department of Mechanics and Aerospace Engineering, [wrote](#) in February that basic research into bioaerosols has been neglected. Because, Deng said, the “fairest” but least useful method of displaying academic influence is looking at the impact factor of a paper, which uses citations as a proxy for importance. Research into bioaerosols would be published in a specialist journal and not the applied science journals that have higher impact factors.

Yao said he isn’t too worried about impact factors, and that papers published in top international journals aren’t necessarily more valuable than those in specialist journals on bioaerosols. “If research makes a contribution to society, people will see it, even if you just post it on WeChat.”

Paws for thought on International Cat Day

Published August 7, 2020, 6:01 PM

[by Agence France-Presse](#)

Videos of frolicking felines and gifs of purring pussies will be how most animal enthusiasts mark International Cat Day on Saturday.



Videos of frolicking felines and gifs of purring pussies will be how most animal enthusiasts mark International Cat Day on Saturday, August 8, 2020. (Vivian LIN, Charlotte MACHADO / AFPTV / AFP)

But for owners who believe their pets are scratchy, aggressive and mean, the problem is probably you, according to a Hong Kong-based cat consultant who has owned 50 in her lifetime.

Feline behaviourist Briganne Carter mostly helps cat owners deal with problems like their pets scratching furniture and urinating outside the litter box, and said “a lot of the time it has more to do with the pet owners than the cats”.

“Most people are really resistant to change in their environment to accommodate the cats,” Carter said. “And they just don’t know a lot about it.”

That’s where Carter comes in.

“I see often a very immaculate place with nice leather furniture, and the cat has nothing. So what’s the cat going to do? The cat needs to scratch,” she said.

Sometimes the solution to destructive behaviour can be as simple as buying a cat tree.

Other times, however, the problem is harder as it may stem from trauma in the animal’s past.

“Cats are super sensitive to emotion,” she said.

Lauren England, 43, pulled a feral kitten from a flooded drain pipe during a typhoon.

The rescue cat bonded with another feral kitten in foster care, so she took home both, naming one Sir Ian McKellen and the other Brian Blessed.

But it was not smooth sailing.

“They were just going crazy when I was in bed at night, and I could just hear things in here smashing and being torn,” England said, describing the kittens’ first week at home.

“It was just like a whirlwind had come through,” noting that she had several plants before the kittens, but was now left with just one.

The kitten she rescued from the drainpipe had started “hissing and spitting”, and that’s when she sought help from Carter.



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“I’ve never really had that level of aggression from a cat,” she admitted, despite growing up with them all her life.

Slowly the cats have come to trust her more, allowing themselves to be stroked — with a toothbrush — and sit at a distance on the couch.

“We’re not there yet but we’re making steady progress,” she said.

For Carter, the job is often as much about helping the pet owners as it is the cats. “I feel like a lot of what I do is counselling people.”

“I’ve got a bit of a life coach as well as a kitten coach at the moment,” England agreed.

What troubles Carter most is that some pet owners often give up on their cats because of “bad behaviour”, instead of seeking behavioural solutions.

“There are thousands and thousands of cats that are needlessly abandoned, given to shelters,” she lamented, “because people don’t realise that the cat’s troubled behaviour is actually very normal”.

“Cats are just being cats,” she says. “They’re doing exactly what they’re supposed to.”

<https://mb.com.ph/2020/08/07/paws-for-thought-on-international-cat-day/>

Youth, there's still time to take action, protect Earth



By [Ludwig O. Federigan](#)

August 8, 2020

I am dedicating my column today and next Saturday, August 15, to be in harmony with the Filipino youth in celebrating International Youth Day on August 12 with the theme “Youth Engagement for Global Action.”

Teenagers as an icon can be traced back to the 1890s, the same period that the foundations for the new century were being laid out. It is the same period as part of the Industrial Revolution. Over the decades, each generation was given identities or names.

The last three generations were identified as Generation X (called Gen X), Generation Y (called millennials), and Generation Z (called Gen Z).

Fires are raging in the Amazon, despite a Brazil government ban. The destruction could be worse than last summer

By Marcia Reverdosa

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The Brazilian government banned fires in the Amazon in mid-July — yet there were far more fires last month than the year before, further degrading one of the world's most precious natural resources. (FILE PHOTO)

(CNN) — The Brazilian government banned fires in the Amazon in mid-July — yet there were far more fires last month than the year before, further degrading one of the world's most precious natural resources.

Last year's destructive fires caused international alarm, and this summer could be even worse, according to experts.

The Amazon is considered vital in slowing global warming, and it is home to uncountable species of fauna and flora. Roughly half the size of the United States, it is the largest rainforest on the planet.

In July, the number of fires increased by 28% compared with the same month a year ago, according to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE), a federal institute that monitors fires and deforestation.

Such fires are typically used to clear any remaining vegetation from parts of the forest that have already been cut down — preparing the soil for illicit pasture planting and cattle raising. July's increase occurred despite a federal decree forbidding for 120 days fires for farming or other purposes in the Amazon and the tropical wetland area known as the Pantanal.

There were 6,803 fires in July, vs 5,318 a year ago, according to INPE, making it the worst July since 2017. When compared to the first six months of last year, the total fire rates for Brazil's Amazon habitat known as the biome, which spreads through 9 states, had actually dropped by 7.6% in 2020. But, data for the two largest states — Amazonas and Pará — showed over 2,000 fires in the period, an increase of 35% from a year ago.

Since President Jair Bolsonaro took office in 2019, deforestation has been on the increase with a nearly 30% jump in the number of fires compared to 2018, according to INPE.

Fires are raging in the Amazon, despite a Brazil government ban. The destruction could be worse than last summer

The Bolsonaro administration has been under pressure to control deforestation since June, when 34 major international investors threatened to divest from Brazilian companies if the government didn't act to curb the destruction of the rainforest. In response, it issued the fires' ban on July 16.

Earlier in the year, the government launched the Green Brazil Operation 2, a military mission headed by the Vice President Hamilton Mourão with the aim of curbing illegal deforestation. "Our goal is to take the fires in the second half (of the year) to the minimum acceptable so that we make it very clear to the rest of Brazil and to the world our commitment to the preservation of the Amazon," Mourão said at a press conference in early June.

At the same event, the Vice President boasted about the partial achievements of the operation. "If we compare the rate of deforestation in May this year with May last year, the fall is almost total."

But he was wrong. According to INPE, 830 square kilometers (approximately 320 square miles) were deforested in May, a rise of 12% from a year earlier.

It mirrors an overall increase in the rate of deforestation, despite the government's claims of success.

The Army, citing its role in Green Brazil Operation 2, said it worked with an average of 3,000 people in the field, including federal and state environmental agencies and police forces, to complete nearly 18,000 inspections, patrols and searches at over 30 locations this year. The initiative led to the confiscation of 28,000 cubic meters of wood, 180 vehicles, 25 boats, 12 aircraft, and the imposition of 407 million reais (about \$80 million) in fines, the Army said.

Yet, since January this year, 34% more Amazonian land was deforested compared to the same period last year, according to INPE. It was the highest rate since 2015, with over 2,000 square kilometers of forest being destroyed, the equivalent of twice the area of New York City.

No trust in the government

Tasso Azevedo, coordinator of MapBiomas — an organization that maps the soil coverage and the land use change in Brazil — says the government cannot be trusted when it comes to protecting the environment.

In May, a video of a governmental meeting showed the Environmental Minister Ricardo Salles saying that the government should take advantage of the media's focus on the Covid-19 pandemic to loosen the environmental restrictions. The video from April 22 was disclosed during an investigation by the Supreme Court into allegations that Bolsonaro was trying to interfere with the Federal Police.

The quote from Salles caught the media's attention. "There is a need to have an effort on our side here, while we are at this moment of tranquility in terms of press coverage, because it only talks about Covid, and let the cattle herd run and change all the rules and simplifying standards," he said.

Azevedo recalled that a decree issued on August 29 of 2019 that prohibited fires in the Amazon for 60 days did have some results at that time. "But as the government has continued showing signs, consistently, that it doesn't want to control the Amazon deforestation [and] so apparently nobody is giving attention to the moratorium this year," Azevedo said.

That view is shared by Paulo Barreto, senior researcher in the Institute of People and the Environment of the Amazon (Imazon), one of the most important research institutes in the region.

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Barreto said that even sending the Army to curb deforestation isn't enough at this point. "It isn't enough just to inspect. To be effective, it is necessary to inspect, to judge, and to apply the penalty, and these two final parts of the process have been weak," Barreto said.

Bolsonaro hasn't helped. The President has repeatedly mentioned he wanted to end the "fine industry" promoted by the government's environmental agency, Ibama.

"The countryman cannot be terrified by Ibama's inspection," he said at an event in June 2019. "We had the lowest percentage of fines [since he is in office] in the field and this will continue to decrease. We will end this fine industry in the countryside."

Ibama issues fines to farmers and others who light fires or use other tactics to clear the forest.

Bolsonaro's attitude "only embolden proponents of deforestation," Baretto said.

They also are bolstered, according to Baretto, by Bolsonaro's criticism of Ibama inspectors who burn loggers' equipment and vehicles.

Under a 2008 law, officials can burn forbidden equipment in isolated areas where it would be hard to remove it otherwise. But in November 2019, Bolsonaro met a group of illegal miners in front of the presidential residency and promised to forbid this practice. "We are going to fix this," he said. "If it got in (the machine), it will get out," he said in front of the Alvorada Palace.

Bolsonaro further questioned the group: "Who is the guy from Ibama who was doing this in that state? If you give me the information, I can..." said Bolsonaro, without completing the sentence.

The legislation authorizing Ibama to burn any equipment found in illegally occupied sites remains in effect, but the agency has been suffering severe cuts on their budget and staff, with high-ranking managers and coordinators being replaced.

It led to the Federal Prosecutor's Office opening an administrative misconduct action against Environment Minister Salles over the alleged monitoring and censoring of Ibama staff, budget cuts and harassment of inspectors.

According to Barreto, in order to truly protect the Amazon, Brazil's government must penalize major loggers. "It would be also important to start to use other kinds of sanctions, such as the blocking of bank accounts and assets," he added. However, according to a study by InfoAmazonia from October 2019 only 3% of the fines imposed by Ibama were actually paid.

CNN reached out to the Vice President office, which is responsible for the battle against deforestation, for a comment on the strategy but it did not respond.

However, in his weekly radio show on Monday, Vice President Mourao acknowledged the challenge posed by the fires in the Amazon.

"Every year, when the period of drought arrives the risk (of fires) increases," he said. "Besides destroying the native vegetation, it kills animals, causes problems to people's lives and here it causes respiratory problems. And at the moment we are facing this coronavirus pandemic, that can be aggravated by the smoke coming from the forests. And of course, serious financial damage not only to the people who live in the Amazon but our country as a whole."



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Fires are raging in the Amazon, despite a Brazil government ban. The destruction could be worse than last summer

And if July was bad this year, August will only be worse, experts predict. "We had more deforestation [in the last months], so the tendency is to have more fires also," Baretto said.

"The deforestation keeps rising for 14 months in a row, and all this material is ready to burn." Azevedo said.

"We can expect a lot of fires in the coming weeks. The conditions are there to the tragedy we feared, of mixing fire, smoke and COVID-19."