

DAVAO CITY: City of Life, not of Plastic Wastes Ban Single Use Plastics, Beat Plastic Pollution!

Davao City is known for its landmark green ordinances, often ahead of the national government, in its intent to safeguard and promote good quality of life for all Dabawenyos. However, strict and full implementation of these ordinances remain a challenge.

Davao City has never been more at the forefront of Philippine economic development with the overwhelming influx of investments and tourists in the city seen to provide jobs and alleviate poverty. But this development, particularly the indiscriminate production and use of plastic products, results in a staggering increase in plastic waste generation and environmental pollution.

Plastics are a threat to both humans and non-human species and their continued proliferation is an irony to the City's claim that LIFE IS HERE.

What are the issues and concerns on plastic wastes?

1. Plastics damage our environment and wildlife

Plastics are not biodegradable. As they are useful for their durability, they persist in the natural environment for thousands of years. Although they may slowly break down into microplastics, they will not decompose and instead find their way to water bodies and be eaten by marine animals. While some plastics are less noticeable such as oxo-degradables designed to degrade quickly, they are still present in the environment and continue to accumulate through time affecting the health of every organism ingesting their debris or by products. In ocean environments, plastic fragments are taken in by filter-feeding organisms. When tiny plankton ingest plastic, animals up the food chain can bioaccumulate larger quantities. Aside from ingestion, plastics can also entangle marine animals, making movement, feeding and growth difficult or even impossible.

According to news reports and Darrell Blatchley, 63 whales and dolphins have been found dead in Davao Gulf since 2009, 47 of which have swallowed plastic trash mistaken as food¹. In addition to this are countless reports of turtles choking and dying due to plastic bags and straws². According to Sea Turtle Conservancy, over 1 million marine animals are killed each year due to plastic debris in the ocean.

Clearly, plastic pollution is a rising and serious concern as it has destroyed many of our marine species and threatens our overall marine biodiversity. No other than the Philippine Constitution explicitly states that *"The State shall protect the nation's marine wealth in its archipelagic waters, territorial sea and exclusive economic zone and reserve its use and enjoyment to Filipino Citizens."*³

2. Plastics pose serious damage to our health

Plastic pollution in the environment poses threat to human health. When they are burned, plastics emit chemicals such as Phthalates, Polyvinyl Chloride and Bisphenol-A (BPA) which are considered toxic for humans.⁴ These chemicals weaken the immune system, affect fetal development for those who are pregnant and may also cause a skin disorder called "chloracne". Plastics likewise release an array of toxic substances both in air and water which study shows may lead to cancer, neurotoxicity, impairment of the nervous and immune system. Fragmenting and microplastics, which enter the human body directly, lead to an array of health impacts (including inflammation, genotoxicity, oxidative stress, apoptosis, and necrosis) that are linked to negative health outcomes ranging from cardiovascular disease to cancer and autoimmune conditions.

Rivers carry plastic waste from the cities to the oceans. Many of these tiny plastic particles are swallowed by farm animals or fish who mistake them for food, which we in turn eat. The toxic chemicals used in manufacturing plastics get transferred to animal tissues, eventually entering the human food chain. Styrofoam products are toxic if ingested and can damage nervous

¹ <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/07/30/19/plastic-trash-found-inside-dead-whales-belly>

² <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1797519>

³ Article XII, Section 2 (2) of the 1987 Constitution

⁴ <https://www.madesafe.org/avoid-toxic-chemicals-plastics/>

systems, lungs and reproductive organs. They've also been found in most of the world's tap water.⁵ They also clog sewers and provide breeding grounds for mosquitoes and pests; plastic waste — especially plastic bags — which increase the transmission of vector-borne diseases like malaria.

Why ban single use plastics in Davao City?

1. It is an environmental safeguard policy for local governments

The city is producing an average of 570-600 metric tons daily. CENRO OIC Engr. Marivic Reyes believes the proposed ordinance banning single use plastics in the city will ease up garbage collection. Aside from the environmental benefits, the ordinance will make garbage collection time efficient.⁶ The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2009 has not been effectively implemented in our city, leading us to explore unnecessary and harmful alternatives such as the incineration and/or waste to energy (WTE) technologies.

Many other Philippine cities and municipalities have taken the initiative to ban plastics. El Nido passed the ordinance in 2017 which strictly prohibits tourists from bringing all single use plastics including PET bottles and Styrofoam containers. Since 2008, Los Baños has banned the use of plastic bags, straws and stirrers. Dumaguete City likewise enforces that their public markets are plastic free. In Mindanao, Cagayan de Oro City, Iligan City, Siargao and Hinatuan, Surigao del Sur, along with Koronadal City in South Cotabato, have already passed ordinances banning single use plastics. (See attachment for Ordinance banning single use plastic by Iligan and Cagayan de Oro City.

Last September 2018, the Davao City Development Council-Executive Committee issued a resolution urging the city council to pass an ordinance on banning single use plastics in both public and private events and activities. Such declaration was adopted by the city hall through a declaration to ban the use of single use plastics in city hall events, meetings and activities. However, the resolution does not include provisions to monitor and penalize compliance within government institutions.

2. There are available, eco-friendly alternatives to plastics

There are many existing and available alternatives to plastics that Dabawenyos have already started to use — reusable bottles for drinking, reusable bamboo/metal straws and food utensils, bayong and ecobags for groceries, biodegradable packaging such as brown paper or banana leaves for dry goods and with reusable containers for wet goods.

Schools such as Ateneo de Davao University, Assumption College of Davao and San Pedro College have taken the lead and have already banned the bringing of any single use plastics in their campuses. SM Lanang has banned the use of single use plastics in their food courts while NCCC malls in Davao have designated green lane counters as incentive to shoppers who bring their own ecobags and biodegradable boxes. NCCC supermarkets likewise use banana leaves instead of plastics in packaging their vegetable products. Coffee shops like Starbucks also encourage their customers to skip single use plastic by offering discounts to those who bring their own reusable tumblers/mugs for drinks. Local businesses that promote zero packaging and give customers refilling stations for products are also available.

These large businesses along with individual zero waste and pollution control practitioners such as our Lunhaw Awardees and community partners prove that skipping plastics is doable and feasible even for a large city such as Davao. These alternatives will not only significantly reduce our plastic waste prolonging the life of our sanitary landfill, they are also more economical and good for our health.

3. Contribute to global solidarity to beat plastic pollution

The United Nations Environment (UNEP) reports that the world currently produces more than 300 million tons of plastics annually, with the Philippines as one of the top five countries contributing to half of all the plastic waste that ends up in the oceans.⁷ It currently calls on national and local governments to adopt policies to reduce the use of disposable or single use

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/sep/06/plastic-fibres-found-tap-water-around-world-study-reveals>

⁶ Better Garbage Collection. Published March 12, 2019 in SunStar Davao.

⁷ United Nations Environment (UNEP). <https://www.unenvironment.org/interactive/beat-plastic-pollution/>

plastic, with Africa as the continent where most countries have adopted a total ban on the production and use of plastic bags.

Acting UN Environment Chief Joyce Msuya said the world needed to "transform the way our economies work...break the link between growth and increased resource use, and end our throwaway culture." More than 99% of plastics are produced from chemicals derived from oil, natural gas and coal — all of which are dirty, non-renewable resources. If current trends continue, by 2050 the plastic industry could account for 20% of the world's total oil consumption.

The cost of ecosystem loss through agriculture, deforestation and pollution was as much as \$20 trillion since 1995. This does not include expenses spent on illnesses and deaths caused by pollution. These things are all linked: waste, pollution, environment, economic growth, health, and well-being.

Calls for Action

We stand with fellow Dabawenyo advocates, Lunhaw Awardees, partner watershed communities and other members of civil society who have taken concrete steps to beat plastic pollution by using eco-friendly alternatives, conducting green events and have been pursuing zero waste lifestyles. It is time for the City Government to replicate noteworthy initiatives of its citizens not only for the conservation of our natural resources but primarily to protect the health and well-being of Dabawenyos.

Specifically, we propose the enactment of an ordinance banning plastics that are disposed after a single use to take effect immediately along with a transition period for short- and long-term phase out of plastics in Davao city:

- A. **For immediate ban upon effectivity of the ordinance:**
 1. Mandate government offices, schools to lead as examples to the public by prohibiting single use plastics in all institutional events and activities;
 2. Mandate commercial establishments to stop using single-use shopping/sando bags.
- B. **To be banned within 6-8 months from the effectivity of the ordinance:** Plastic straws, coffee stirrers, plastic utensils (spoon, fork, knife, spork, chopsticks), plastic containers for sauces, plastic cups, and food packaging along with balloons of any kind (including plastic holders) used as decoration for parties/events in all malls, fast food chains, restaurants, catering businesses and other commercial establishments
- C. **Transition period will be given to producers or manufacturing companies** for products sold and distributed in Davao City:
 1. Within one year from the effectivity of the ordinance: Malls, commercial establishments, sari-sari stores and other small retail businesses are mandated to set up refill areas or offer refills for products such as coffee, chocolate drinks, sugar, salt and the likes as well as personal hygiene products such as shampoos and soaps to encourage consumers to bring reusable containers;
 2. Within 2 years, manufacturers of menstrual pads, diapers, wet wipes and the likes should be required to include in their packaging an instruction to customers on the proper way of disposal; and
 3. Within 3-5 years, phase out of single use plastics packaging such as shampoos, beauty essentials and laundry soaps, personal hygiene products, processed food, kitchen essentials, bottled water and juices, and plastic bags used in agricultural plantations.

In banning the single-use plastics, the City is adhering to the State's duty to "protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them as enshrined in our Constitution".

As the Supreme Court pronounced in the case of *Oposa vs Factoran*, we have an "intergenerational responsibility" which indispensably includes, inter alia, the judicious disposition, utilization, management, renewal and conservation of the country's forest, mineral, land, waters, fisheries, wildlife, offshore areas and other natural resources to the end that their exploitation, development and utilization be equitably accessible to the present as well as the future generations.

Davao City is known to be the leading local government unit when it comes to passing ordinances that protects and benefits its citizens. The banning of single use plastics is the rational next step and sustainable way to go if we want Davao City to remain as the city where life is.