

Firecracker-related injuries down 40%

By **CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE**

On the eve of the New Year revelry, the Philippine National Police (PNP) recorded a 40 percent decrease in firecracker-related injuries compared to last year.

For his part, PNP chief Director General Ronald dela Rosa appealed to the public to help the police welcome 2018 peacefully.

The PNP, with the Department of Health (DOH), hopes that the public will heed calls for a safer celebration of the New Year with fewer fires, death and injuries, Dela Rosa said.

Contrary to reports, the PNP said a total of 72 firecracker-related injuries were recorded from Dec. 21-29, which is 40 percent or 48 cases lower than last year's 150.

This year's figure is also 59 percent lower than the previous five-year average for the same period with 104 cases.

In the same report, the PNP said 14 persons were arrested for selling illegal firecrackers.

Nine persons were arrested including two police personnel, five civilians, security guard and government official, for illegally discharging their firearms, the PNP said.

Quoting the DOH report, the PNP said there were no cases of firecracker-ingestion and stray bullet injuries.

Dela Rosa attributed the significant decrease in firecracker-related injuries to the early campaign operations and surprise inspections of the PNP at pyrotechnic-selling establishments.

Meanwhile, the PNP encourages the public to post pictures or upload videos on social media of persons who use firearms in celebrating the New Year or report them to the nearest police station.

In the past, pictures and

videos of individuals indiscriminately firing their firearms went viral on Facebook, prompting the authorities to trace them.

Dela Rosa reminded police chiefs of the one-strike policy, saying they would be relieved if they fail to solve cases of deaths and injuries caused by stray bullets during the holidays.

The PNP chief said the bullet that hit a woman in Ilocos Sur on Christmas Eve was not stray as initial investigation revealed that she was targeted by a still unidentified suspect.

The DOH is getting closer to its target of cutting down fireworks-related injuries by half, even as nine more people were hurt due to the use of illegal firecrackers.

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, the DOH's Epidemiology Bureau recorded nine additional firecracker-related injuries, bringing to 86 those treated

in different government and private hospitals nationwide.

National Capital Region (NCR) accounted for 51 percent of the total cases with 44, followed by Western Visayas with 11, Bicol region with nine, and Central Visayas with six.

Among the cities in NCR, Manila accounted for the biggest number with 25 or 57 percent.

A majority of the cases were males, from 11 months to 62 years of age, and many or 77 percent of them were active users.

Most of the patients sustained blast injuries with only 16 percent sustaining eye injuries. Only four had blast injuries with amputation.

Seventy-four percent of the injuries were caused by illegal firecrackers like *piccolo*, which was used by 63 percent of those injured.

The DOH previously announced that it is looking for a

50-percent drop of firecracker-related injuries this year with the implementation of a new policy regulating the use of firecrackers.

Meanwhile, the DOH advised the public to immediately seek medical help once they sustain fireworks-related injuries to avoid tetanus infection.

"Injuries sustained as a result of fireworks, no matter how small, can be deadly and must not be ignored," the DOH said.

Fireworks-industry stakeholders also see the need for more trained persons to supervise fireworks displays in community fireworks display areas.

The stakeholders, who do not want to be identified, confided to **The STAR** that for several years annual safety seminar workshops were conducted by the Civil Security Group of the PNP in coordination with fireworks associations in the country.

They believed that it is about time that law enforcers should also undergo seminar workshops for them to properly implement the provisions of Executive Order No. 28 and Republic Act 7183 or the Firecracker Law.

Police Deputy Director General Fernando Fernandez Jr. and Police Regional Office-3 Chief Superintendent Amador Corpus inspected several firecracker stores and warehouses in Bocaue, Bulacan last Saturday.

"We are continuously conducting operations, particularly for firecrackers which have been a common cause of disasters. We are inspecting stores region-wide to ensure that no illegal firecrackers will get through us," Corpus said.

- With Mayen Jaymalin, Ramon Efren Lazaro, Ric Sapnu