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DENR orders closure of 300 Boracay establishments

By RHODINA VILLANUEVA

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Roy Cimatu disclosed yesterday that closure orders would be issued against 300 erring establishments in Boracay that were found non-compliant with environmental laws.

Cimatu said he has instructed the DENR regional director in Region 6 to immediately serve the notices of violation to the erring establishments.

"I already issued an order for the concerned official to start serving the notices to these establishments and then follow due process. Our environment office in the area is in charge of checking those that are connected to the main sewer lines and those that failed to comply with environmental laws," the DENR chief said.

Cimatu said establishments are given two months to either connect to the sewage treatment plant of Boracay Island Water Co. or install their own wastewater treatment facilities.

Cimatu made the announcement yesterday at the launch of the Green Film Festival at SM North EDSA in Quezon City. The festival is an environment project for college and high-school students sponsored by the DENR, Commission on Higher Education and SM Cares, the corporate social responsibility arm of SM Prime Holdings Inc.

He said the inspection of Boracay is based on the order of President Duterte to clean up Boracay within six months, adding they are checking the sewage system of all establishments in the world famous island.

The DENR's regional office in Boracay has identified at least 300 establishments with violations, including not being properly connected to the main sewer lines. This resulted in pollution of Boracay waters.

Cimatu said around 50 to 60 percent of all establishments in Boracay are compliant with Republic Act No. 9275 or the Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004.

"All the rest direct their

pipes to the canals which drain to the sea," he said, referring to the 300 establishments.

The DENR earlier conducted a probe of the establishments and found that these companies don't maintain their own sewage treatment facilities. This reportedly causes overflow of untreated wastewater.

Aside from the sewage problem, Cimatu said the DENR will also go after resort owners who have constructed buildings within areas classified as forestlands.

"Forestlands are no-build zones. What they have done is against the law," Cimatu said, referring to Presidential Decree No. 705 or the Revised Forestry Code of the Philippines.

Cimatu said he had already issued a directive that no new environmental compliance certificates (ECC) will be issued in Boracay to prevent the construction of new buildings there.

Cimatu vowed to complete the clean-up within six months given by the President.

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AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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DENR ORDERS CLOSURE OF 300 BORACAY ESTABLISHMENTS

Traders alarmed

The Boracay Foundation, Inc. (BFI), the biggest business organization in the island, has expressed alarm over Duterte's threat to close Boracay if the environmental problems in the area are not addressed.

In a statement released on Monday, BFI said they believe the President's pronouncement stems from misinformation and unverified data presented to the Chief Executive.

"While there are indeed many violators, most of the island's business establishments are strictly in compliance with prevailing ordinances and regulations," the group said.

BFI said it is not justified to close the entire island at the expense of establishments that comply with the law.

But BFI said it welcomes the six-month ultimatum given by the President to the agencies and departments concerned to address the issues of Boracay's pollution.

BFI claimed the group has focused on initiatives such as coastal resource management to preserve the island.

But with the rapid growth

of tourism, the island's problems have been mounting.

However, BFI said they have continuously expressed their frustration and dismay over the lack of attention given by the national government and other concerned officials to the island of Boracay.

With Malacañang now keen on fixing Boracay, BFI is hopeful that the island's issues would be addressed as concerned agencies would be pressured to immediately fix the local problems.

For the BFI, the solution is quite simple: strictly implement existing environment laws and local ordinances and close all erring establishments immediately.

"To close the island would be an easy way out and too much to bear for the residents who depend on the island's tourism for their livelihood," the BFI said.

With Boracay now in the limelight, the BFI vowed to collaborate with concerned agencies to address the issues faced by implementing real solutions to the problem.

BFI also called on its members to strictly comply with

and follow the necessary policies to be implemented.

Nenette Graf, BFI president and also Sangguniang Bayan member of Malay town that had jurisdiction over the island, said they came up with a statement following an emergency meeting with its members Monday afternoon.

DENR-6 public information officer Artem Colacion said DENR regional executive director Jim Sampulna will meet Cimatú this week.

In July 2017, DENR-6 said it is investigating Boracay establishments that are not connected to the island's sewerage treatment facilities.

He said the firms that continue to defy the law will risk losing their ECC while the Department of Tourism plans to cancel their accreditation.

Sampulna, however, declined to release the list of violators in their initial investigation.

But he confirmed that some establishments have connected their sewerage pipes to the piping system for rainwater. — With Louise Maureen Simeon, Jennifer Rendon