

## DENR STARTS CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL SMALL-SCALE MINERS

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After clamping down on large-scale mines last year, Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu is now on a mission to separate the good and the bad in small-scale mining as he begins with its legalization and regulation.

Following his recent order to shut down illegal small-scale mines, the secretary vowed to fast track the processing of Minahang Bayan applications by small-scale miners and assured that no mining activities would be allowed outside designated areas identified by the agency.

To operate as Minahang Bayan, small-scale miners must organize themselves and prove that they have the capability and financial resources to adhere to the standards and requirements set by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for them to conduct a mining operation.

There are 65 pending applications for Minahang Bayan in the Cordillera Administrative Region alone, where illegal mining operations are prevalent. According to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, no area has been declared Minahang Bayan there, although some applications have already been

endorsed to the bureau.

Just last week, Cimatu led the blasting of 18 mine tunnels in Sitio Basa, Camp 4 in Tuba, Benguet, which led to the closure of several adits and confiscation of mineral products, chemicals and several equipment used by illegal miners.

Mine tunnels that had intruded the military reservation of the Philippine Military Academy were also ordered closed.

"We have to implement the law," Cimatu said during his visit to the province, adding that some of these operations used highly toxic substances.

"I sympathize with these people. What they're doing is very dangerous so I hope they would be able to find other ways to earn a living other than illegal meaning," he added.

Cimatu also ordered the creation of a national task force that would help MGB ensure the strict implementation of existing mining policies and regulations as well as other related environmental laws.

It will also begin a crackdown of illegal small-scale mining activities around the country and will run after illegal importers, retailers and distributors of explosives and cyanide used in small-scale mining operations. INQ

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