

QC to ban single-use plastics in 2020

Plastic bags, one-time use paper utensils also covered under new ordinances

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Starting next year, Quezon City will ban single-use utensils, whether made of plastic or paper, as well as plastic bags—a momentous step for the biggest city in a country that accounts for an outsize share of plastic waste globally.

At a press conference on Sunday, Mayor Joy Belmonte announced the sweeping policy as outlined in two ordinances signed in October that attempt to deal with the city's voluminous waste, composed mostly of nonrecyclable materials.

City Ordinance No. SP-2868 amended an existing ordinance that required “Type 1” retail establishments like supermarkets, department stores and pharmacies to charge P2 for plastic bags. Starting on Jan. 1, there will be a total ban, with no option to pay a fee for a plastic bag.

Transition period

On the other hand, City Ordinance No. SP-2876, which bans single-use plastic and paper utensils, will take effect in February to allow businesses a three-month transition period.

This ordinance will apply to fast-food restaurants, coffee shops, hotels and any other place that have “set up tables and chairs within their area of business for purposes of allowing customers to consume meals, snacks [and] refreshments,” said Councilor Dorothy Delarmente.

Delarmente, who introduced both measures as chair of the committee on parks and environment, said the materials included cups, plates, straws, coffee stirrers, condiment cups and packets—whether made of plastic or paper—and Styrofoam packaging. The ban only applies, however, to those used by dine-in customers.

“We would like to emphasize that this ordinance prohibits single-use plastic/disposable materials regardless of how it was made or manufactured, whether biodegradable plastic or other forms,” she added.

Aside from eating utensils, the law also bans hotels and other service-oriented businesses from distributing soap, shampoo and similar hygienic items in sachets or single-use containers.

Violators of the ordinance will be fined P1,000 on the first offense, an amount that gradually increases to P5,000 by the third offense. On the second offense, the enterprise will be issued a cease-and-desist order, while a third offense would lead to its business permit being revoked.

The ordinance on plastic bags will be implemented in two phases. The first will be the total ban on the distribution of plastic bags, while the second phase, effective in two years, will be expanded to include single-use paper bags as well.

Exempted

The only exception are the plastic “labo” used to wrap unpacked fresh and cooked foods, typically in wet and dry markets.

The expansive ordinances reflected some of the most drastic measures taken yet by a local government to rein in plastic use. But Belmonte framed it as necessary to “prevent and reduce the generation of waste materials that are hardly recovered and recycled.” “This will be beneficial for the environment and the people as these avoidable wastes are known to add to the city’s huge waste production and to littering and flooding problems,” she added.

Andrea Villaroman, head of the Quezon City **Environmental Protection and Waste Management Department**, said plastic bags in the city accounted for a daily 16 cubic meters of waste, or one truckload, while plastic cutlery added up to 10 cubic meters, the equivalent of a mini dump truck.

Villaroman also pointed out that the majority of the plastic waste in the city was generated by business establishments and not residential areas.

The new plastic bans were commended by environmental groups, some of which had previously criticized the fees for plastic bags as insufficient. Delarmente said they had initially planned on increasing the charge to P10, but businesses proposed prohibiting the bags altogether.

Green Fund

The fees went into a government-managed “Green Fund,” which now totaled P316 million as of the latest audit.

“This action from the ground should encourage the speedy approval of a robust national legislation phasing out single-use plastics and other disposables to advance the consumption and production agenda,” said Aileen Lucero, Ecowaste Coalition national coordinator.