Silence of the Lamps

EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.

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The views do not necessarily reflect the official position of the SSNC.
From January 30 to February 28, 2014, the EcoWaste Coalition, an environmental watchdog aspiring for a zero waste and toxics-free society, conducted a photo investigation in Metro Manila to obtain fresh evidence to stress the urgent need for an environmentally-sound management of mercury-containing lamp waste, including a practical system for their safe collection, storage and recycling.

During this period, the EcoWaste Coalition’s AlerToxic Patrollers went to Caloocan, Las Piñas, Makati, Malabon, Mandaluyong, Manila, Marikina, Muntinlupa, Navotas, Parañaque, Pasay, Pasig, Quezon, San Juan, Taguig and Valenzuela Cities and the Municipality of Pateros to document existing lamp disposal practices.

Equipped with a cellphone and a digital camera, the group managed to take more than 100 photos of discarded fluorescent lamps of all types, sizes and conditions – long and short, fat and thin, linear, circular and spiral, broken and intact – in garbage bins, street corners, sidewalks, vacant lots and even in esteros.

The photos clearly demonstrate how busted or spent lamps are currently handled and disposed of, individually and by the dozen, without regard for occupational and public health and safety. Waste lamps, as the photos show, are typically abandoned at the fence, gate, lamppost or by the roadside for the waste collectors to pick up. Often they are left behind in vacant lots or thrown indiscriminately into rubbish dumps and creeks.

Such irresponsible disposal practices may cause the glass tubes to break and explode, especially during mixed waste hauling operations, instantly crushing the lamps and releasing their mercury content in vapor form.

Unknown to many, the indiscriminate disposal of busted or spent fluorescent lamps as common trash is not only polluting the surroundings, but is also exposing waste handlers, informal recyclers and the public to mercury, a potent neurotoxin, which can lead to acute and chronic intoxication even at low levels of exposure.

According to the “Guidebook on the Management of Mercury-Containing Lamp Wastes” published by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Department of Energy (DoE) with support from the United Nations Development Programme – Global Environment Facility, “when mercury-containing lamps are broken, compacted, crushed, or disposed of improperly, mercury is released into the air, water and land, posing significant threat to people and the environment.”

As said by the Guidebook, “mercury and its compounds are highly toxic… even low level exposure to mercury has caused serious health effects that including neurological damage, reproductive system damage, behavioral problems and learning disabilities.”

While welcoming the Joint Administrative Order (JAO) No. 2013-09-2001 issued in September 2013 by the DoE and DENR tasking the lighting industry to establish a system for Extended Producer
Responsibility (EPR) that will make the industry responsible for the management of busted or spent lamps, the EcoWaste Coalition is deeply concerned that its implementation has not moved fast enough to deal with the existing problems of end-of-life disposal of lighting products, as reflected by the photos.

Knowing that the EPR system will take time to be fully operational, the EcoWaste Coalition appeals to the DoE, DENR and other stakeholders to fast track the implementation of the said JAO, while also pointing to the urgency of instigating practical measures towards the safe collection and storage of lamp waste from households, businesses and institutions even before the EPR system gets underway.

Such measures should include, among other things:

Extensive public information drive on lamp waste handling, storage and disposal to prevent mercury exposure through inhalation, ingestion and dermal or eye contact.

a. Waste workers’ education about the hazards of mercury in the waste stream and the need for precaution.

b. Designation of convenient drop-off points for lamp waste with appropriate receptacles.

c. Provision of incentives to encourage waste generators to bring their lamp waste to the designated drop-off points.

d. Safe and secure storage of collected lamp waste for proper, non-polluting recycling.

In addition, the EcoWaste Coalition insists that fluorescent lamps must be required to carry mercury warning labels in line with the public’s right to know and be forewarned. Aside from the mandatory hazard and precautionary information, specifying the mercury content on the packaging and the lamp itself will facilitate proper identification and inventory of lighting products to be phased out by 2020 under the Minamata Convention on Mercury, which DENR Secretary Ramon J.P. Paje signed in Japan last October 2013.

Under the Mercury Treaty, the manufacture, import or export of compact fluorescent lamps equal to or less than 30 watts with more than 5 mg of mercury per bulb shall not be allowed by 2020. Also to be phased out by 2020 are triband phosphor linear fluorescent lamps less than 60 watts with mercury content exceeding 5 mg per lamp, and halophosphate lamps less than or equal to 40 watts with mercury content exceeding 10 mg per lamp.

Moreover, the EcoWaste Coalition calls on the lighting industry to invest more on clean production solutions, including the development of high-quality, energy-efficient, affordable and nontoxic mercury-free lighting substitutes.

May this photo collection aptly entitled “The Toxic Silence of the Lamps” put light on the real health and environmental issues associated with inappropriate disposal of mercury-containing lamp waste, and move the government, industry, civil society and the citizenry to act with speed and resolve to protect the public health and the environment from mercury pollution.

EcoWaste Coalition
March 2014
The Toxic Silence of the Lamps

EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.

A. del Mundo St., Second Ave., Caloocan City

C3, Dagat-Dagatan, Caloocan City
THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS
Vacant Lot, Zapote-Alabang Road, Almazan 1, Las Pinas City

Zapote-Alabang Road, Pamplona 1, Las Pinas City

Caton St., near La Paz Elementary School, Makati City
The Toxic Silence of the Lamps
EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.
Buendia Ave. cor. Dian St., Makati City
Baler St., Makati City

THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS
The Toxic Silence of the Lamps
EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.

Vacant Lot, Bautista St. cor. Finlandia St., Makati City
Vacant Lot, Cardona St., Makati City

THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS
Araneta Ave., Potrero, Malabon City

Gov. Pascual, Potrero, Malabon City

Boni Ave., Mandaluyong City
The Toxic Silence of the Lamps

EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.
UNIVERSIDAD DE MANILA, MANILA CITY

THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS
Vacant Lot, Paliparan St., Marikina City

Gen. Molina St. (near Supreme Bike Center), Marikina City

The Toxic Silence of the Lamps

EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.

Vacant Lot, Mary St., Provident Village, Marikina City

Gate, National Road cor. Aguilar St., Putatan, Muntinlupa City

THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS
Gate, Our Lady of the Abandoned Catholic School, Poblacion, Muntinlupa City

Post, National Road (near RP Construction Supply), Putatan, Muntinlupa City
The Toxic Silence of the Lamps

EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.

Vacant Lot (near Banco Alabang), National Road, Putatan, Muntinlupa City

Railtrack (near Alabang PNR Station), Muntinlupa City

Vacant Lot (near Banco Alabang), National Road, Putatan, Muntinlupa City
The Toxic Silence of the Lamps
EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.

Wellton Building, Taft Ave.
Pasay City

Vacant Lot, P. Burgos St., Pasay City
Vacant Lot, Central Business Park, Amang Rodriguez Ave., Manggahan, Pasig City
M. Almeda St., near RCBC, Pateros

G. Flores St., Pateros

THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS
The Toxic Silence of the Lamps
EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.

Near the Municipal Hall, Pateros

Del Monte Ave, near cor. Banawe St., Quezon City

THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS
The Toxic Silence of the Lamps

EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.
LTFRB, East Ave., Quezon City

Mega Air Enterprises, Aurora Blvd., Duyan-Duyan, Quezon City
THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS

EcoWaste Coalition, Philippines, March 2014.

Sidewalk of vacant building, Aurora Blvd, Cubao, Quezon City

EDSA cor. Howmart St., Balintawak, Quezon City

Matalino St., Quezon City
Vacant Lot, Libis, Quezon City

Vacant Lot, opp. Eastwood Police Station, Libis, Quezon City

THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS
Aurora Blvd. near A. Lake St., San Juan City

Aurora Blvd. cor. A. Luna St., San Juan City

Aurora Blvd. near R. Lagmay St., San Juan City

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N. Domingo St. near BPI, San Juan City

F. Manalo St., Vicencio Compound, Taguig City

F. Blumentritt St. cor. F. Roxas St., San Juan City

The Toxic Silence of the Lamps
F. Manalo St., opp Polintan Compound, Taguig City

Gen. Luna St., in front of Artemio Natividad Elementary School, Taguig City