

THE

SILENCE OF THE LAMPS

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The views do not necessarily reflect the official position of the SSNC.

THE TOXIC SILENCE OF THE LAMPS

A Photo Investigation on Prevailing Disposal Practices for Mercury-Containing Lamp Waste

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.

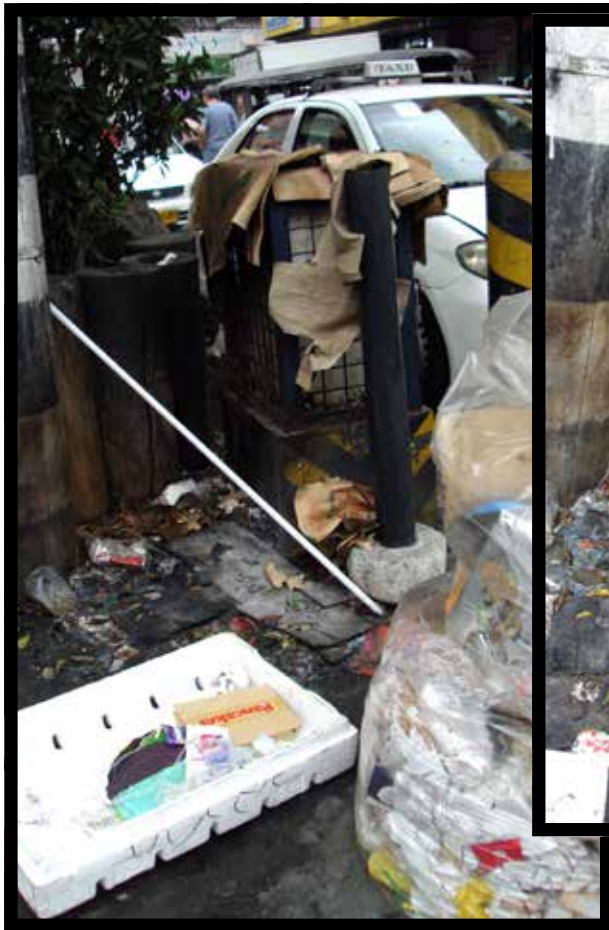
EcoWaste Coalition
March 2014



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



C3, Dagat-Dagatan, Caloocan City



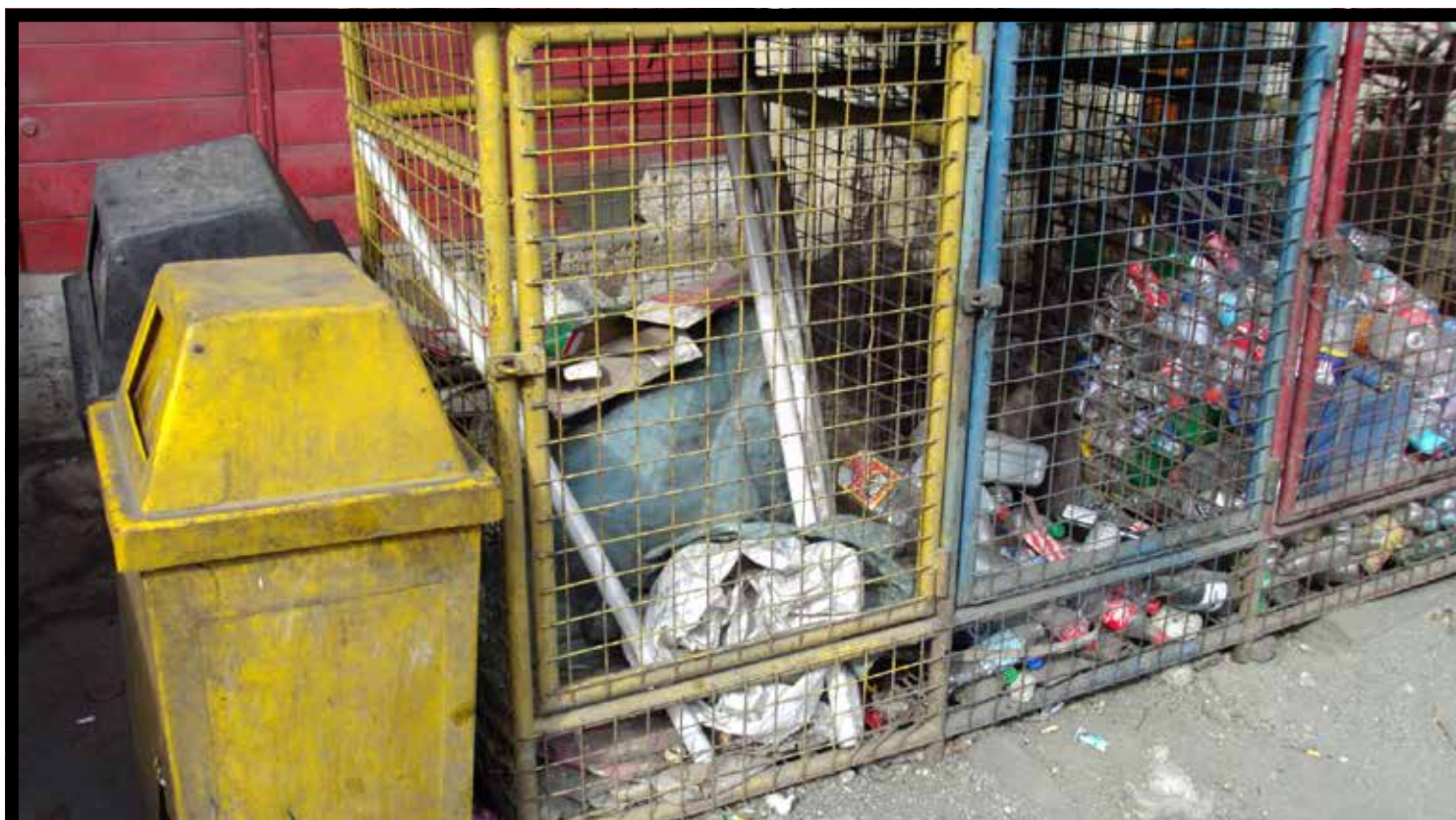
EDSA cor. Asuncion St., Caloocan City



Cordero St., Second Ave., Caloocan City



M, H. del Pilar St., Caloocan City



Second Ave., Caloocan City



P. Sevilla St., Second Ave., Caloocan City



Samson Road (near Arroyo's Bigasan), Sangandaan, Caloocan City



Vacant Lot, Zapote-Alabang
Road, Almazan 1, Las Pinas City



Caton St., near La Paz
Elementary School, Makati City



Zapote-Alabang Road,
Pamplona 1, Las Pinas City





Angono St. cor. Osmena St., Makati City



Yague St., Makati City



Baler St., Makati City



Buendia Ave. cor. Dian St., Makati City





Edison St., near Kainan ni Aling Paz, Makati City



South Ave., Makati City





Vacant Lot, Cardona St., Makati City



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



Araneta Ave., Potrero, Malabon City



Gov. Pascual, Potrero, Malabon City



San Bartolome Parish, Malabon City



Reyan Junk Shop, Guava St., Potrero, Malabon City



Boni Ave., Mandaluyong City



Boni Ave., Mandaluyong City



Boni Ave., Mandaluyong City



Vacant Lot, EDSA, Mandaluyong City



Vacant Lot, EDSA, Mandaluyong City



Creek, Binondo, Manila



Creek, Legarda St., Bustillos, Manila



Manila City Hall



Pedro Gil St. (in between Mercury Drug Store and Coenfa Fashion House and Gen. Merchandise)





Plaza Cervantes, Manila



Soler St., Manila



Universidad de Manila, Manila City





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



Vacant Lot, Paliparan St., Marikina City



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



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



Gate, Our Lady of the Abandoned Catholic School, Poblacion, Muntinlupa City



Post, National Road (near RP Construction Supply), Putatan, Muntinlupa City



Railtrack (near Alabang PNR Station), Muntinlupa City



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



Sidewalk (near King Harrold Memorial Chapels),
National Road, Alabang, Muntinlupa City



Vacant Lot, Molina St.,
Alabang, Muntinlupa City



M. Naval St., Navotas City





Opena St., Paranaque City



Aurora St., Pasay City



Dominga St. (outside Rafael Palma Elementary School), Pasay City



Taft Ave. Ext., Pasay City



Taft. Ave near cor EDSA, Pasay City



Wellton Building, Taft Ave.
Pasay City



Vacant Lot, P. Burgos St., Pasay City



Amang Rodriguez Ave. near
Shell, Santolan, Pasig City



Entrance, Mahogany St., F. Agapito Subd.,
Santolan, Pasig City





Entrance, St. Joseph the Worker,
Ortigas Ave. Ext., Rosario, Pasig City



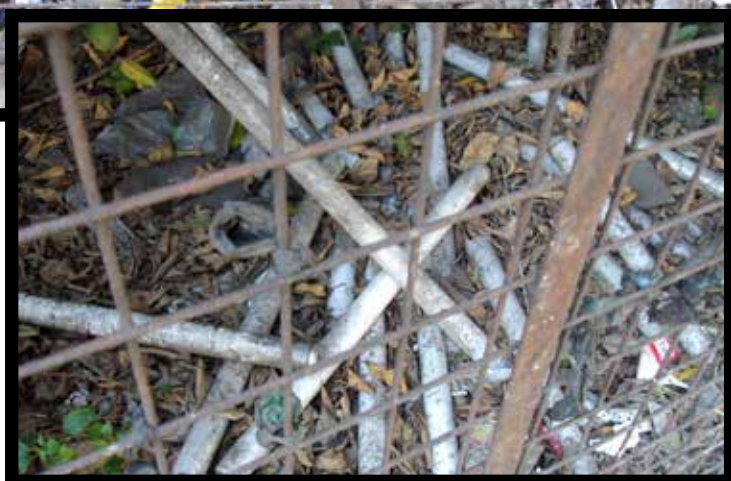
Fence, Little Lambs Learning Center, Ortigas Ave. Ext., Rosario, Pasig City



Wall, Smart Driving, Ortigas Ave. Ext.,
Rosario, Pasig City



Vacant Lot, Central Business Park, Amang Rodriguez Ave., Manggahan, Pasig City



M. Almeda St., near RCBC, Pateros



G. Flores St., Pateros



M. Almeda St. opp. Martinez del 96, Pateros



T. Sulit St. near Lotto, Pateros



Near the Municipal Hall, Pateros



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



Anonas St., near Asian Tropics Salon and Day Spa, Quezon City

15th Ave., near Bayantel, Cubao, Quezon City



Kalayaan Ave. cor. Masigla St., Quezon City



Kamias Road, Quezon City

Kamias Road, near Metrobank,
Quezon City



Kamuning St., Quezon City



LTRB, East Ave., Quezon City



Mega Air Enterprises, Aurora Blvd., Duyan-Duyan, Quezon City



Matalino St., Quezon City

EDSA cor. Howmart St.,
Balintawak, Quezon City



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

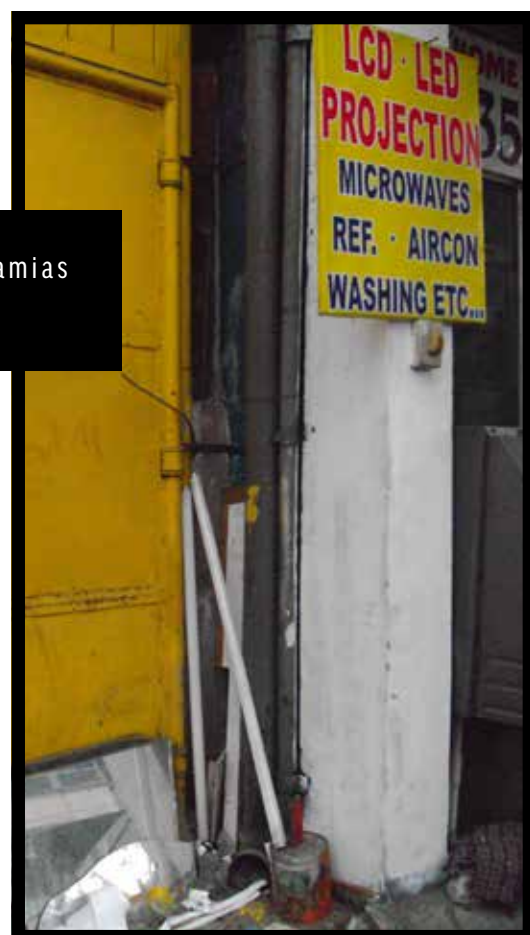


Sidewalk, Libis, Quezon City



New York Electronics, Kamias Road, Quezon City

Molave St., Anonas, Quezon City





Vacant Lot, Libis, Quezon City



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



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





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





F. Manalo St., opp Polintan Compound, Taguig City



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



Mariano St. near Autoworks, Taguig City



Aidia St., opp. UCCP,
Bagumbayan, Taguig City

MacArthur Highway,
Valenzuela City





Santiago St., Km 16, MacArthur Highway, Valenzuela City



MacArthur Highway, near BDO-Dalandanan, Valenzuela City



