

Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

July 2006

Clean Air in Manila: Possibility or Pipe Dream?

By Lisa Lumbao and Glynda Bathan

For many of us, the many joys of living in the Philippines are tempered by the menace of air pollution: we worry about our kids developing asthma and we wonder how dark our lungs have become due to the pervasive smoke and smog. So we were heartened to hear from our speaker, environmental lawyer Glynda Bathan, that there is some progress being made to address the problem.

Glynda is the Local Network Coordinator of the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities (CAI-Asia) and a tireless advocate for clean air in the Philippines. After law school she worked in her mother's law firm doing "run-of-the-mill" lawyering. Her desire to do something more fulfilling was realized when she was asked to help draft the implementing rules and regulations of the new Clean Air Act as part of an Asian Development Bank (ADB) project. She has since become an expert in the field and in organizing huge annual conferences for CAI-Asia. Lisa recounted how Glynda always kept her cool in the midst of daily crises in planning the 2002 conference in Hong Kong, while Lisa was losing her cool!

Glynda explained that Metro Manila is one of the many cities in Asia faced with the challenge of providing clean air for its growing urban population. Particulate matter levels in Metro Manila exceed the World Health Organization's (WHO's) guidelines. Particulate matter is a complex mixture of extremely small particles and liquid

droplets made up of acids, organic chemicals, metals, and soil or dust particles. The smaller they are the more dangerous because they go deeper into a person's lungs. In a study by the World Bank in 2002, Manila was found to have spent an estimated \$392 million per year on health costs from air pollution.

However, studies by CAI-Asia show that across Asia, where urban and vehicle populations are growing, key pollutant levels are either stabilizing or are decreasing. This can be attributed to the efforts undertaken by governments and other concerned groups to control air pollution. But much still needs to be done to reduce air pollution because while trends show stabilization, air pollutant levels remain above the health-based standards.



Glynda Bathan

In a benchmarking study of air quality management capability in Asian cities by CAI-Asia and the Stockholm Environment Institute, Metro Manila's capability was ranked Stage III or Moderate, which means that cleaner processes and systematic procedures have been developed and air pollution is on a decreasing trend from previously high levels. Pollutants

(Continued on page 2)

Next MWF Meeting

When: 6:30 p.m., Monday, July 17, 2006. **What:** Jill Gale de Villa will speak about the legendary Filipino photographer Masferre whose black and white photographs beginning from the 1930s captured images of the Cordilleran peoples from the central Philippine mountains and their cultural practices. Jill worked with Masferre in publishing a coffee-table book of his work in 1988.

Where: Marion Bestani's home, One Roxas Triangle, Paseo de Roxas at Cruzada Street, Apartment 43 Laguna, Makati City. **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. **August meeting:** Monday, August 21, 2006.

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of concern in Metro Manila are particulate matter and hydrocarbons.

Air quality monitoring is an important part of air quality management. Major cities in the country have the capacity to monitor total suspended particulates but not other pollutants. Metro Manila, Cagayan de Oro, and Cebu have more advanced monitoring systems. More important than monitoring, however, is air quality reporting so that the public may know the quality of the air they breathe on a daily basis. Real-time air quality reporting is provided by the Manila Observatory at Ateneo University through their website <http://www.observatory.ph/resources/doas/doas.php>.

Motor vehicles are the largest source of air pollution, particularly diesel vehicles in Metro Manila and 2-stroke tricycles and motorcycles in other urban areas. Among the challenges in reducing pollution from vehicles in the Philippines are: (i) poor vehicle maintenance, (ii) inefficient public transport system, and (iii) unsuccessful anti-smoke belching programs due to lack of enforcement capacity and resources. There are a few success stories in reducing pollution from tricycles. These are Puerto Princesa, which has implemented a number-coding scheme to reduce the number of tricycles on the road, and San Fernando City in La Union Province, which has provided soft loans to owners of 2-stroke tricycles to purchase 4-stroke tricycles, which are less polluting. Both cities have also provided training on proper maintenance with assistance

from ADB and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Multi-sector networks such as the Partnership for Clean Air (Philippines) and CAI-Asia help bring stakeholders together to take action to improve air quality in Metro Manila. PCA is working with the complainant from the Philippines National Environmental Action Team (IBP-NEAT) to operationalize the citizen suit provision of the Philippine Clean Air Act. This is the first law in the Philippines that allows citizens to sue those who are violating the law (and exempts the complainant from court filing fees). Under IBP's Take-A-Pic-4-Clean-Air program, citizens can take a picture of a smoke-belching vehicle, write down the plate number, date, and location and send it to the IBP lawyers. These lawyers (currently Glynda and her colleague Karen, who also joined the MWF meeting) are working pro bono on this project. Once they receive a photo and related information, they request the vehicle owner's name and address from the Land Transportation Office (LTO) and mail the owner a Notice to Sue. The notice requests the vehicle owner to fix his/her vehicle so it will comply with the vehicle emission standards and then bring the vehicle for emission testing at the LTO East Avenue testing center. If the vehicle fails the test, an administrative suit will be filed against the vehicle owner at the LTO or the corresponding office covering public utility vehicles. If you would like to participate, e-mail the

photo and related information to Glynda and Karen at smokebelchers@yahoo.com.

During the discussion portion of the meeting, some asked about the prevalence of emission testing centers passing vehicles that are never tested or that fail the test. Glynda said this has become a big problem among the private emission testing centers but that the government has begun monitoring them and has shut several down because of this practice. It also helps if vehicle owners insist on having their cars tested rather than paying extra to avoid the test and thereby encouraging corruption.

Others stressed the importance of enforcement, saying that filing court cases will not make a big impact. Glynda explained that enforcement is quite weak because only a few of the 17 local governments in Metro Manila have their own roadside apprehension team to catch smoke belchers, and these teams are quite small and only go out a few days a week.

Although the topic was a bit technical, Glynda made it accessible and interesting, and enlightened us about the problem and current efforts to combat it. With the efforts of Glynda and her colleagues at CAI-Asia, PCA and IBP we hope the government and the public will be encouraged to take action to improve our air quality. For more information on air quality management in the Philippines, please visit <http://www.cleanairnet.org/philippines> and in Asia, <http://www.cleanairnet.org/asia>. ■

Use Alternative Fuels!

Fuels that significantly reduce air pollution from your vehicle are now available in some gas stations in the Philippines. We can make a real difference in cleaning up the air if we switch to these alternative fuels.

If you have a diesel engine, start filling up with coco bio-diesel, available premixed at all Flying V gas stations. It is the same price as regular diesel and contains 1% coco bio-diesel. It can be used with all diesel engines and even has lubricating and cleaning benefits. If you have a gasoline engine, the

following Shell stations carry premixed ethanol fuel that can be used in any gasoline engine: 1) EDSA corner Buendia in Makati; 2) Pasong Tamo in Makati; 3) South Triangle, Quezon City; and 4) Quirino Ave. in Manila.

Other actions you can take: Don't let your engine idle. The US Environmental Protection Agency says you will save gas by turning the engine off and restarting it again if you expect to idle for more than 30 seconds. Instruct your driver to do so as well!

Keep your vehicle well maintained; try to reduce the number of trips by carpooling or using the MRT or LRT.

Refueling: Spilled gasoline pollutes the air when it evaporates. Watch what you do at the gas station to prevent

spills and overfills. It's best to avoid "topping off," especially in hot weather. (Since we don't pump our own gas here, maybe this can be avoided by getting less than a full tank.)



ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNE DE LEON / ISIS INTERNATIONAL MANILA

Clean air. That got me to thinking about clean water, clean living, clean lives, clean versus dirty, and cleanliness per se. Even clean caves! Bonus: A secret for staying married - see item at bottom right.



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KaWoMeNaN

Selected and edited by
Beulah Pedregosa Taguiwalo

Clean air, clean water, clean selves, clean caves

“the dollars in his pocket
won’t buy him...clean streets
...or clean air....”

“Tax reduction has an almost irresistible appeal to the politician, and it is no doubt also gratifying to the citizen. It means more dollars in his pocket, dollars that he can spend if inflation doesn’t consume them first. But dollars in his pocket won’t buy him clean streets or an adequate police force or good schools or clean air and water. Handing money back to the private sector in tax cuts and starving the public sector is a formula for producing richer and richer consumers in filthier and filthier communities. If we stick to that formula we shall end up in affluent misery.”

John William Gardner,
The Recovery of Confidence (1970)

“...clean water was just something you took for granted.”

“People always ask us, ‘Are things better or worse today?’ Well, some things are better and some things are worse....But there are a lot of problems in the world today that no one dreamed of when we were young. For instance, this business about the environment. Why, clean water was just something you took for granted.”

Elizabeth Delany,
*The Delany Sisters’ Book
of Everyday Knowledge*

The Asian Brown Cloud

The Asian Brown Cloud is a layer of air pollution covering parts of the northern Indian Ocean, India, Pakistan, and parts of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China. In proper humidity conditions it forms haze. It is created by a range of airborne particles and pollutants, characteristic of biomass burning and industrial emissions due to incomplete burning. The cloud is associated with the winter monsoon from December to April, during which there is no precipitation to wash out the pollution.

Spare the Air

There’s such a thing as the Spare the Air program, which operates to combat air pollution during the summer in the San Francisco Bay Area. It was established by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District in 1991.

Days on which the smog is predicted to exceed health standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency are declared to be Spare the Air days. On a Spare the Air day, bay area residents are asked through radio and television announcements to reduce their driving, refrain from using gas powered gardening equipment, and refrain from other air polluting activities such as painting.

People with special sensitivity to smog are advised to limit their time outdoors. It is possible to sign up and receive AirAlerts by email or by text message to a cell phone or pager. On certain non-weekend Spare the Air days, public transportation is free.

Smog is a portmanteau

Smog is a kind of air pollution, and the term itself is a portmanteau—a word that was formed by combining both the sounds and the meanings of the words “smoke” and “fog.”

Classic smog results from large amounts of coal burning in an area and is caused by a mixture of smoke and sulphur dioxide.

In the 1950s a new type of smog, known as photochemical smog, was first described. This is a noxious mixture of air pollutants including nitrogen oxides, such as nitrogen dioxide; tropospheric ozone; volatile organic compounds (VOCs); and peroxyacyl nitrates (PAN). All of these chemicals are usually highly reactive and oxidizing.

Due to this fact, photochemical smog is considered to be a problem of modern industrialization.

“We have to learn how to come out of unclean situations cleaner than we were, and even how to wash ourselves with dirty water when we need to.”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), German philosopher, classical scholar, critic of culture

“Keep the cave clean.”

“I’ll tell you the real secret of how to stay married. Keep the cave clean. They want the cave clean and spotless. Air-conditioned, if possible. Sharpen his spear, and stick it in his hand when he goes out in the morning to spear that bear; and when the bear chases him, console him when he comes home at night, and tell him what a big man he is, and then hide the spear so he doesn’t fall over it and stab himself.”

Jerome Joseph Chodorov
Fields, Anniversary Waltz

The Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol is an agreement made under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Countries that ratify this protocol commit to reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases, or engage in emissions trading if they maintain or increase emissions of these gases. The Protocol now covers over 65% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and more than 163 countries worldwide.

Signatory governments are separated into two general categories: developed countries who have accepted strict GHG emission reduction obligations, and developing countries who have no GHG emission reduction obligations. Under the Protocol, developed countries have to pay and supply technology to other countries for climate-related studies and projects.

Current position of some governments

Russia - Vladimir Putin approved the treaty on November 4, 2004 and Russia officially notified the United Nations of its ratification on November 18, 2004. The issue of Russian ratification was particularly closely watched in the international community, as the accord was brought into force 90 days after Russian ratification (February 19, 2005).

United States - Although a signatory to the protocol, the USA has neither ratified nor withdrawn from it. The signature alone is mostly symbolic, as the protocol is non-binding over the US

unless ratified. The current President, George W. Bush, has indicated that he does not intend to submit the treaty for ratification, not because he does not support the general idea, but because of the strain he believes the treaty would put on the US economy.

Canada - Canada ratified the treaty on December 17, 2002. Numerous polls have shown support for the Protocol at around 70%, but there is still some opposition, particularly by some business groups, non-governmental climate scientists and energy concerns, using arguments similar to those being used in the US. It is feared that since US companies will not be affected by the Kyoto Protocol, Canadian companies will be disadvantaged in terms of trade.

China - China says that the emissions level of any given country is a multiplication of its per capita emission and its population. It has adopted population control measures while maintaining low emissions per capita, and it considers criticism against these as unjust. It says that if cannot control its population and at the same has to cut its emissions, its people will remain poor forever.

India - India signed and ratified the Protocol in August, 2002. Since India is exempted from the framework of the treaty, it is expected to gain from it in terms of transfer of technology and related foreign investments. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh says that the per-capita emission rates of the developing countries are a tiny fraction of those in the developed world. Moreover, India maintains that the major responsibility for curbing

emissions rests with the developed countries, which have accumulated emissions over a long period of time.

European Union - On May 31, 2002, all fifteen then-members of the European Union deposited the relevant ratification paperwork at the UN. The EU produces around 22% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and has agreed to a cut, on average, by 8% from 1990 emission levels. The EU has consistently been one of the major supporters of the Protocol, negotiating hard to get wavering countries on board.

(Adapted from Wikipedia)

The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

Visit our website – a work in progress
www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

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