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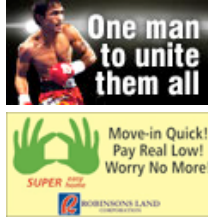


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Greenpeace inspects polluted Marilao river

By TJ Burgonio
Inquirer

Last updated 08:19pm (Mla time) 10/12/2007

MARILAO, Bulacan, Philippines — Greenpeace activists on Friday inspected the Marilao River here, and saw firsthand how it landed on the notorious list of the world's dirtiest rivers.

Garbed in white protective suits, the activists on board boats collected water samples and saw a myriad of garbage -- plastic wrappers, rubber slippers, banana trunks and a bloated carcass of a dog -- floating in the dirty, brown river.

"We want to highlight the pollution in our water systems because these are dying and portend a water crisis in the long run," Greenpeace toxics campaigner Beau Baconguis told reporters.

Greenpeace released a study on the quality of water systems in the country early this week and said the quality of fresh water resources was steadily declining and was compounded by water scarcity.

This came weeks after the Blacksmith Institute named Meycauayan City and Marilao town in Bulacan as two of the world's "worst polluted places" in 2007, and said that the river system was extremely polluted.

"No one dares catch or eat fish in that river because it's so dirty," said Conchita Arevalo, 62, a long-time resident of the village of Saog that overlooks the river.

"The only time we eat fish is when the river overflows during heavy rains."

Despite campaigns by the local government, including hefty fines, households still throw their garbage, and factories release their effluents into the river.

Greenpeace said that much of the pollution comes from tanneries, textiles and electronics recycling industries operating near the river

The group found high levels of lead in the effluent samples taken from the discharge canal of the Philippine Recyclers Inc., a large smelting plant that operates on the bank of the river, in 1996 and 2003.

It also found other toxic chemicals such as chromium, cadmium, copper and arsenic from the effluents released by the other plants.

The samples taken from the river would be brought to a laboratory abroad for tests for possible presence of toxic chemicals, specifically heavy metals, according to Greenpeace.

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A team of Greenpeace "Water Patrol" activists called attention to the extent of pollution in Marilao River by unfurling a 28-meter banner with the words "stop the toxic pollution, protect our water resources" Friday in Bulacan province. INQUIRER/JOAN BONDOC



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"We believe that communities have a right to know what chemicals are lurking in their water and the dangers these may pose to their health and well-being," Baconguis said.

She said the Marilao government should improve its sanitation system, and strictly enforce policies regulating industries.

"The type of poison these industries are releasing into the river should be looked into and used as a basis for the granting of permits," she said.

Greenpeace is also targeting other water systems for its water sampling campaign, but declined to disclose these.

"This is just the start of our campaign," Baconguis said. "We want to call on our government officials to shift from pollution control to pollution prevention. It's time to push for clean production."



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