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Mayor irate as Napocor cuts down city mangroves

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PUERTO PRINCESA CITY – An irate Mayor Edward Hagedorn on Tuesday ordered a stop to the National Power Corp. (Napocor) project in the coastal area of Barangay Bacungan, north of the city, after Napocor workers cut down centuries-old mangrove trees to install backbone transmission lines.

A Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) official told the Inquirer that they had so far counted nearly 200 mangrove trees, mostly old-growth, that were destroyed.

Hagedorn sent an enforcement team to the area on Tuesday and confiscated the cut mangroves and a chainsaw used by the workers.

“What they have done is set back our efforts to protect these important resources. I want to make sure someone is held accountable for this,” Hagedorn said.

Romualdo Consigna of the local Napocor office told the Inquirer over the phone that they had a “special permit to cut” issued by the DENR.

Consigna said the Napocor obtained the permit last year for the backbone transmission project. The permit required Napocor to replant 25,000 saplings of mangroves and nonmangrove species.

He said Napocor had to cut down the trees to comply with the required ground clearance for transmission lines.

Elmer Maquitoque of the local DENR office, however, said the special tree-cutting permit that the Napocor presented during a site investigation did not allow the power firm to cut the mangroves.

“They (Napocor) have a tree-cutting permit but only for naturally growing trees. But they have instead cleared an entire area of old growth mangroves,” Maquitoque said.

Local radio station manager Louie Laroza, who accompanied the investigating team, said the area cleared by Napocor was composed of mostly old-growth mangroves, including stands of over 36 feet in diameter.

Hagedorn said he had asked environmental lawyer Antonio Oposa to file a case against Napocor for violating a Palawan law that protected old-growth mangrove forests.

In 1981, a presidential decree issued by the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos declared Palawan a Mangrove Forest Reserve, prohibiting the destruction of mangroves.

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