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INQUIRER

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How German technology can contain PH flood disasters

The world is drowning. While it continues to battle the global pandemic, yet another calamity has literally drowned several parts of Asia and America.

For two consecutive weeks in November, Typhoons "Rolly" and "Ulysses," with international names Goni and Vamco, respectively, lashed several areas in the Philippines affecting millions of people and damaging millions worth of dollars to infrastructure. Just after leaving the country, Ulysses went straight to Vietnam and continued blowing up. The same situation happened in Central America as Hurricane Iota brought heavy rain, extreme winds and storm surges. Iota is just one of the 30 hurricanes to cross the region.

Why is this happening?

For years, experts rally around climate change as one of the major contributors to the increased frequency and intensity of tropical storms. The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, based in Arlington, Virginia, notes that warmer sea surface temperatures could intensify tropical storm wind speeds.

We must admit that these storms and the flooding they bring is a serious predicament, affecting many.

All flooded, rich and poor

Flood troubles us all: the poor, the rich and everyone in between. There are four major places that flood can intrude: 1) residences; 2) factories; 3) commercial buildings; 4) governmental buildings and areas. These structures have entrances that play an important role in flood prevention. During typhoons, flood water can enter through doors, gates, windows, drainage systems and pipes; hence, they have to be closed. But how do we close them, you ask? Through temporary "walls." I call these "walls" flood barriers. These barriers are cost-effective and can be demountable or moving. They can be dropped-down, flipped-up, raised up with or without electricity. For over 30 years, these barriers have been making a name worldwide as the best solution for flooding, starting their success story in Limburg, Germany.



MAPPING THE FUTURE

ANDREAS KLIPPE

So what can these flood barriers protect that I talk about them with pride? A lot.

Data from the Office of Coordination and Humanitarian Affairs show that around 183,000 houses were damaged during Typhoon Rolly in the Philippines. As a house owner, you can protect your main door, backdoor or garage with demountable flood barriers. This kind of barrier is cheaper than the automatic ones and works as a reliable solution against flooding.

A reasonable protection cost may start at P80,000 and can go up depending on the scope of your property. Before you gasp in horror at the price, think of the money, time and energy you can spare when you do not have to fix the mess every time it is damaged by flood. Making a good investment that will last for the next 50 years is unquestionably economical.

No more production interruption

Production can be interrupted by flooding and a drastic domino effect could follow that. Notice this. Once the production area is flooded, the company cannot produce enough supply. When there is limited supply, there are fewer customers. With fewer customers, there will be low production. Less products are translated to less profit. And with less profit, less taxes are paid. Consequently, everyone is affected by flood damages. The company also has to clean all the clutter.

You do not need to experience this. You can secure your company by investing in cost-effective flood protection barriers.

Hotels, malls and shops also deserve protection as they are

valuable. Far greater than giving jobs to many people, these businesses have helped in improving the economy. When your businesses are flooded, there is significant loss. You lose customers, you lose investments and you lose money. To mitigate the loss and save as much as you could, you resort to giving huge discounts to customers. You know for sure that this is not the best path a business owner should take, right? We do business to make money, not lose them.

You can protect your investments against flood by installing flood barriers around your business's premises.

Critical infrastructure

Aside from private business and residences, critical infrastructure should also be protected. What is "critical infrastructure"? All installations, systems and buildings that contribute to the primary operation of a country are considered critical infrastructure. These are jails, police stations, power plants, telecommunication units, water stations, terminals, city halls, schools, local governmental units and the list goes on. Singapore, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, France all protect their critical infrastructure. Why can't the Philippines do the same?

Critical infrastructure can be protected against flood damage with modern flood control technology. These demountable flood barriers have been installed in more than 65,000 systems in 34 countries since 1990; with certificates from the US-based FM Global insurance and the Philippine Department of Public Works and Highways, you know that you can only expect the best.

The technology is proven by 11 nuclear power plants in France, six in the United Kingdom, the oldest university in Cork, Ireland, the Wall Street Plaza, the Porsche headquarters in Stuttgart, and top 100 companies like BASF, Nestle, McDonalds, Porsche. Still some doubts?

In Asia, 20 Singaporean subway stations are also equipped with this German technology. Doha Education City, one of the flashpans of the Emir of Qatar, re-

cently received German flood protection for 12 huge buildings in their breathtaking education city, including their National Convention Center.

In the Philippines, while SM recently protected two malls in Bacoor and Molino, Cavite, the majority of the country remains hesitant about this.

The solution

Certainly, we want to live in a disaster-free environment with our loved ones. It can be argued that the government cannot give this kind of environment to its citizens yet. Are we totally hopeless then? No. We can do something.

President Kennedy once said, "Do not ask what the country can do for you. Ask yourself what you can do for your country." I would change it a little bit into "what you can do for yourself?" Do not wait for the government to solve your issues. It is just impossible.

A better life starts when you work for it. House owners should protect their homes, factory managers should protect their manufacturing site and the warehouses, mall and hotel owners should protect their premises. The government should join and start protecting the national critical infrastructure.

We are all in this together. In the future, we hope we will not have to see heart-breaking news of flood damages. But we have to start with investing today.

Stay safe and flood-free.

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This article reflects the personal opinion of the author and does not reflect the official stand of the Management Association of the Philippines or MAP. The author is the chair and president of Flood Control Asia RS Corp., Clark, Pampanga, responsible for all RS activities in Asia/Pacific. He is the chair of the North Luzon chapter of the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines. A speaker and writer, he is a German engineer and Philippine resident.