



National Environmental Policy reveals tilt towards industries

The draft National Environmental Policy (NEP), which was released for comments from the public on August 21, 2004, suggests that the Ministry of Environment and Forests is concerned more about corporate interests than environmental issues.

A case in point is the issue of emissions. Unmindful of the fact that emission and ambient standards are meant to protect public health, the policy gives precedence to the financial health of corporations by proposing that the "emission standards for each class of activity need to be set on the basis of general availability of the required technologies, the feasibility of achieving the applicable environmental quality standards at the location... and the likely unit costs of meeting the proposed standard."

While the policy discusses the role of

international environmental initiatives, it ignores international commitments. It does not express its stance on the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO) with regard to the environment, given the fact that WTO is busy preparing a list of environmental goods and services.

Despite the Supreme Court's directions, NEP fails to highlight and provide a mechanism for incorporating environmental literacy in the National Education Policy.

The most ominous omission is its failure to take note of the Industrial Policy and its adverse consequences on our ecology. The draft attempts to weaken the already inadequate regulatory mechanisms meant to safeguard the environment. For instance, the draft NEP highlights the need to 'reduce

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Looking away from a deadly killer!

Scientists, activists, medical professionals and impacted people from the world over gathered for the Global Asbestos Congress 2004 in Tokyo in December 2004.

India stands out as one of the world's largest users of the killer fibre. Over 125,000 tonnes of white asbestos is used in India. The bulk of it goes into the making of cement sheets, while other uses include auto clutch and brake linings, pipes, etc.

Though banned for use in over 40 countries, the asbestos market in India is growing, aided by a reduction in custom and manufacturing duties. The material is almost completely imported from Canada, besides other countries such as Russia.

Its continuing use despite worldwide evidence of its deadly health effects, like cancer, is owing to a powerful established industry, worth over Rs 1,000 crore which pitches this material as a cost-efficient option for a 'developing' country. However, there is growing evidence that this is causing grave harm, especially amongst workers. Estimates put this as high as 30 deaths per day!

The refrain from the industry, claimed in large full-page advertisements in national dailies, is that amongst the three types of asbestos, white asbestos is safe. Scientists, however, deny this artificial differentiation, saying that dosage may differ but the fibre essentially acts in similar manners once inhaled into the lungs. Single fibres can cause cancerous conditions five to 30 years after exposure. The condition is worsened if accompanied by smoking or if inhaling smoke from indoor *chulhas*, both conditions especially common amongst women workers. Cases of household members contracting diseases even through fibres carried home by worker's clothing have been documented.

'Safe Use' is the mantra provided. How that takes place in the hundreds of thousands of locations where asbestos sheets are sawed, nailed, broken or discarded is a mystery.

Policy committees have perfunctorily focussed on the 'number' of fibres in air which the working environment should conform to (0.5 fibres per cubic centimetre), when everyone is aware of the conditions inside such units. The failure is all around, from consumers not protesting, to worker unions not taking the issue on board, or policy not attempting to promote cleaner alternatives but buying into the rhetoric of the industry.

The writing is on the wall, and looking away is not going to help anyone!

Ravi Agarwal

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delays' in environment clearances of projects but ignores the fact that most delays are caused by inadequate, incorrect or improper fulfillment of the mandatory requirements under the Environment Protection Act or Forest Conservation Act. It is ironic that the draft NEP condones the view that environmental legislations are to blame for delaying development, sidelining the fact that unsustainable 'development' processes destroy the environment!

Besides that, the NEP has several loopholes and fails to answer important questions such as:

- ▲ Why is the Supreme Court being forced to play the role of the Environment Ministry? How are clearances being given to dams, mines, roads, ports, industries, and other projects, without adequate environmental clearances?
- ▲ Hasn't the Ministry really become a clearing agency for commercial activities that are unsustainable and destructive to the environment?
- ▲ Why has the NEP been prepared without due participatory process? Who are the people who participated in the claimed 'participatory process'?
- ▲ Why are genetically modified crops and seeds being pushed without socio-economic and environmental impact studies? How is this risky technology being encouraged without long-term safety tests, and almost no public inputs?
- ▲ Why has Extended Producer Responsibility, an extension of the 'Polluter Pays' principle for end-of-life products, not been incorporated in the policy to transfer the liability of dealing with electronic waste, batteries and other branded products like PET bottles to the manufacturer?

The failure of NEP was vividly revealed when a petition on behalf of civil society was submitted by Sanjay Parikh, a Supreme Court lawyer, to the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee (SCMC), highlighting the violations of Hazardous Waste Management Rules, 2003 by Bhushan Steel and Strips Limited. The metal scrap was imported without a licence, though there are prescribed norms to prevent the import of hazardous material.

Ignoring the demand of environmental groups to ban import of hazardous waste, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has now altered the import policy to specify that import of metallic waste and scrap would be permitted only in the "shredded and compacted form" (imports can be undertaken through all ports without any licence). The NEP fails to respond to this issue.

NEP also fails to address corporate crime vis-a-vis ecology as it proposes civil liability whereas what is required is corporate criminal liability in keeping with judicial pronouncements and UN norms on Transnational Corporations. The NEP makes no mention of the three most ecologically destructive projects: networking of rivers, Gujarat's Kalpsar project and the proposed Sethu Samundaram, which have the potential to change the landscape of the country.

In a nutshell, the draft NEP is incoherent, non-cohesive, lacks vision, promotes the continuing degradation of the environment and fails to recognise the global trend towards a precautionary approach to development vis-a-vis the environment.

Gopal Krishna

National Conference calls for a boycott of asbestos products

Alarmed at continuing asbestos usage, its fatal consequences and the misinformation campaign mounted by the asbestos industry, environmental groups, aided and accompanied by trade unions and labour organisations, have sought the immediate phase out of white asbestos.

An appeal to boycott all asbestos products was made at 'The National Conference on Workers' Plight and White Asbestos Trade' held on November 8, 2004. In India asbestos is still used in the manufacture of pressure and non-pressure pipes used for water supply, sewage and drainage, packing material, brake linings and jointing used in automobiles, heavy equipment, nuclear power plants and thermal power plants, amongst others. The current demand for asbestos in India is to the tune of 125,000 metric tonnes.

Speaking about the hazardous nature of asbestos, Dr T.K. Joshi, Director, Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health, Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital, New Delhi, informed the audience in his keynote address that "even if one asbestos fibre reaches the right place, it causes

irreversible damage – leading to asbestosis, lung cancer or mesothelioma."

Dr S.K. Dave, Director, National Institute of Miners' Health, debunked the asbestos industry's claim of safe asbestos, saying that "all kinds of asbestos are cancer causing, including white asbestos, and there is no cure for diseases caused due to asbestos exposure. The diseases caused by it may occur years after a person has stopped working in an asbestos factory or mine and it is difficult to track these workers and do cohort studies. We do not have such infrastructure in the country. Also, a person with these debilitating diseases won't be working; he will either be in hospital or would have died."

The lethal nature of asbestos is now an established fact, though the asbestos industry strives to have us believe that there is such a thing as safe asbestos. Thirty deaths are caused per day from asbestos-related diseases as per estimates based on US and European studies. It is not surprising that almost 40 countries have banned asbestos, said H. Mahadevan, General Secretary, All India Trade Union Congress and Vice President, National Safety Council.



The asbestos industry is virtually sentencing its workers to death by employing unsafe practices.

"When the world is preparing and planning to get rid of all forms of asbestos, it makes us look stupid in India to be still importing it. We should devote our scarce resources to preventing the impending disaster by phasing it out as soon as we can," added Dr Joshi.

Despite the fact that the World Trade Organization has given a judgement against it, upholding France's decision to ban the import of asbestos from Canada, successive governments in India have promoted this killer mineral fibre, showing complete disregard for the health of the general public and the workers. "The most vulnerable and affected people are the workers in asbestos manufacturing units who work under extremely hazardous conditions," said P.K. Ganguli of Centre for Indian Trade Union.

A resolution for the safety of asbestos workers was passed at the conference, exhorting the government to work out a timetable to phase out asbestos. White asbestos continues to be used in India although other kinds of asbestos, such as blue and brown asbestos, are banned. Safer substitutes for white asbestos are available and they should be used, advised Pranjal Jyoti Gowswami of CEC.

Prof Arun Kumar, Department of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, was of the opinion that the government has committed a grave blunder by reducing the customs duty on asbestos in the Union Budget.

It is a conflict between the money of the asbestos industry and the knowledge of the scientific and medical community, and there is no doubt that truth will prevail, felt Ravi Agarwal, Director, Toxics Link. He felt that a consumer does not need to see a 'body' but can decide for him/her self given complete information. For this a nation-wide information campaign should be launched to counter the untruths of the asbestos industry. After all, how many consumers would want to use a material if they knew that a single exposure to it could cause cancer, even after 10 years?

The asbestos industry also needs to adopt the 'precautionary principle' which advises caution in the use of products that are deemed dangerous. Or is responsible behaviour asking for too much from such an industry?

Gopal Krishna

Incineration is good! A non-conventional idea

The Ministry of Non-conventional Energy Sources (MNES) has issued a controversial executive order to all State Chief Secretaries and administrators of Union Territories asking them to promote waste-to-energy projects.

As a consequence, agreements for many such toxic projects have either been signed or are in the process of being signed around the country. Surprisingly, these projects have undergone no environmental impact assessment or public hearing process. The approval from the Technical Appraisal Committee has also not been sought.

At the same time, the Indian Commerce and Industry Ministry has categorically termed incinerators as a polluting technology, which is being thrust upon developing countries.

What then is the truth? Is incineration harmful or beneficial?

According to Mark Radka of the UN Environment Program, "An incinerator is a technology – a piece of equipment – and

whether the energy generated by burning waste in it is renewable or not depends on the nature of the waste being burned. If one burned waste that was composed of biomass, agricultural residues and waste paper, I would say the energy is renewable. If it burned plastics and other petroleum-derived materials I would say the energy is not renewable. In both instances there will be greenhouse gas emissions. There might be POPs emissions and mercury emissions depending on what went into the incinerator, but it is impossible to know this without examining the details."

Responding to Mr Radka's comments on incinerators, Paul Connett, Professor of Chemistry, St Lawrence University, New York, and Founder Member of Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives said, "In my view, there are three things that are needed to protect the public from any pollutant emitting facility: strong regulations; adequate and scientific monitoring of the facility; and aggressive enforcement by government when the facility exceeds its limits. If any of these are weak, public and environmental protection is a pipedream. Simply put, even strong standards, if they are not monitored scientifically and appropriately and not enforced, mean nothing. Put another way, incinerators have passed permit testing with glowing colours during the one-day permitting process, but have proved a nightmare for those citizens who have had to live with the machine for the other 364 days in the year. This is the difference between theory and practice and I can testify to the fact that this difference has damaged thousands of lives."

How do incinerators damage lives?

Burning of waste in an incinerator transfers the hazardous characteristics of waste from solid form to air, water and ash. It also releases new toxins, which were not present in the original waste stream, besides generating heavy metals. Turning waste into ash by processing it inside an incinerator vastly increases the surface area of the garbage and thus makes it leach much more rapidly. What you get at the bottom is

not a thin, weak leachate but a rich, strong leachate, more toxic than what it would have been if it had leached raw garbage.

Some experts say that incineration is unambiguously polluting. The suggestion that there are 'good incinerators' and 'bad incinerators' is ridiculous, according to them.

There is a need for greater circumspection within the sub-sectors of 'environmental' services because notorious attempts to encourage incineration of municipal waste to produce energy and treating it as a renewable energy project is fraught with disastrous consequences.

This is demonstrated in Chennai, where Energy Developments Limited (EDL), an Australian company, is dumping untried and untested technology which has been deemed redundant in Australia. The plant is proposed on the Pallikarni wetland which is known for sheltering 26 species of birds. In Perengudi, Chennai, residents are being used as guinea pigs. Mothers' milk has already been tested and it contains high amounts of dioxins due to exposure to waste burning. As a result, the Municipal Corporations of Delhi and Kanpur have withdrawn from the agreements with EDL.

The truth is that waste burning and combustion technologies violate the Kyoto Protocol, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and the recommendations of the Global Mercury Assessment Report. The rationale for trade in goods which violate environmental international treaties, and attempts to promote them as environmental goods and services, is questionable.

Therefore, environmental groups welcomed the views of the Indian Economic Advisor to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, S. Nigam, who said that solid waste incinerators, which are considered environmental goods by some, are deemed as polluters by others. Such goods should not be included in the list of environmental goods and services, he added.

At a time when the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is taking a progressive stance, it is alarming to note that the MNES is subsidising hazardous technologies like combustion and gasification. The MNES is zealously providing technological solutions to management problems.

Gopal Krishna



Incinerators produce toxins and heavy metals which are not present in the original waste.

Hazardous waste takes an explosive turn

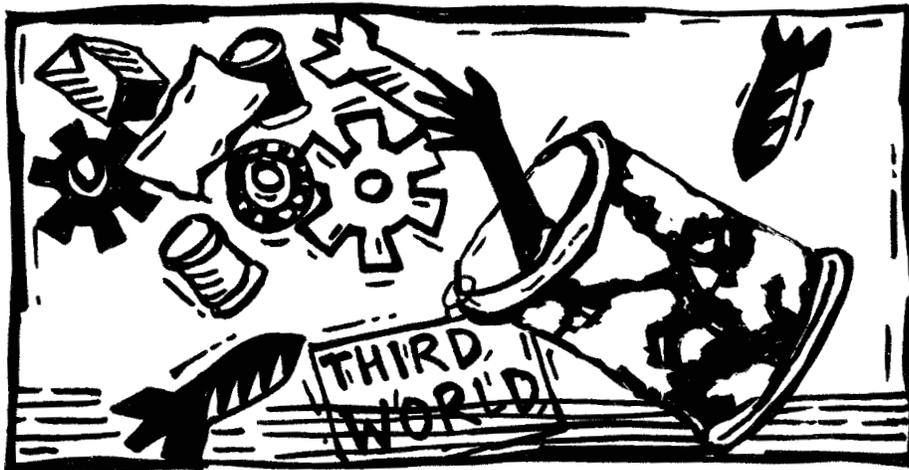
In a bizarre sequence of events, hundreds of live rockets and shells cropped up around Delhi, Ghaziabad and parts of North India after the blast at the Bhushan Steel and Strips factory in Ghaziabad. It needed the loss of 10 lives for the government to wake up to another sordid saga of lax regulations and corruption.

Metal scrap has been imported by container loads for decades. Since it is not pre-sorted, it often contains live shells or explosives when sourced from war zones. Importers routinely sort the scrap for reusable or high-value items including brass, copper wire, lead and sometimes even re-usable engines or engine parts.

What is our government doing?

Jolted by the Bhushan Steel explosion and the consequent surfacing of ammunition in metal scrap shipments in Mumbai, Kandla and Punjab, the government has restricted the import of metal scrap. On October 15, 2004, the government tightened import norms, even as it admitted that the recent consignments that contained explosives originated from war-ravaged Iraq. Hence, steel companies will have to fork out more for imported metal scrap.

The government has also imposed other restrictions. Shredded scrap is now costlier than unshredded scrap and the need to import scrap through particular ports (14 have



been assigned) will add to costs. Import of such scrap is now subject to 100 per cent physical examination before getting customs clearance. Importers will be advised to take assistance from police authorities for forensic examination of metal scrap consignments. While screening of such consignments will be done by the police at ports, importers will have to bear the cost of examination, identification and disposal of explosive materials. Big importers will have to keep the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Intelligence Bureau informed about the source of scrap – 23 certifying agencies have already been recognised for the purpose of pre-shipment inspection, including those based abroad. Shipping companies will be advised to load cargo in the vessel only with pre-shipment inspection certificates. The customs department will also lay down the procedures for inspection, as a measure for

increased circumspection.

People who have imported scrap consignments unknowingly will be given an opportunity to voluntarily disclose it within a margin of 10-15 days. Exporters will also be blacklisted if live shells are found in their consignments, officials said.

“Import of metallic waste and scrap shall be permitted in shredded and compacted form only. However, metallic waste and scrap in unshredded and uncompact form may be imported through the major ports (covered by the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963) and the Inland Container Depot in Tughlakabad, New Delhi, only,” the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) notification states.

It is likely that importers will stay away from countries like Iraq in view of the detailed documentation and certification. Unfortunately, the restrictions come at a time when many consignments are pending at major ports including Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Mumbai. The Finance Ministry has sought the assistance of forensic experts trained in handling explosives and radioactive materials.

The issue raises several other questions. Can the government be sure that the problem is restricted to sporadic findings of rockets and shells? Are they certain that this is not a convenient conduit for shipping small quantities of ammunition to militants?

Movements of hazardous waste of all kinds is meant to be defined and controlled, or prohibited, under the terms of the Basel Convention. It is high time that the Government of India ratified the Basel Ban. The warning shot has been fired.

Kishore Wankhede

Defusing the law

The Hazardous Waste Rules define hazardous waste as “any waste which by reason of any of its physical, chemical, reactive, toxic, flammable, explosive or corrosive characteristics causes danger or is likely to cause danger to the health or environment, whether alone or when in contact with other wastes or substances.”

Iron and steel scrap is included in List B of Schedule III of the Hazardous Waste Rules, under the Basel entry B-1010 where its import is not restricted. But, the items in List B have to be read with part B of Schedule III in order to determine whether the waste in question is hazardous or not.

The iron and steel scrap in this case contained explosives, inflammable and other toxic substances, and thus was hazardous waste. This hazardous waste had been imported under the guise of iron and steel scrap, hence defying the Hazardous Waste Rules, 2003, and the Supreme Court ban order dated May 5, 1997.

Gautampuri residents take control of waste management

The residents of Gautampuri, a resettlement colony near Badarpur, South Delhi, have demonstrated the power of citizenship through their efforts at cleaning up their colony. The residents, who are mostly industrial workers with an average income of Rs 2,000, have teamed up with Toxics Link and Arpana Trust, an NGO that has been working in Gautampuri on health and education issues for the past five years. The goal is to have a Zero Waste Gautampuri by the end of the year.

The role of the Toxics Link-Arpana Trust collaboration has been to educate the community in waste management and facilitate meetings with municipal bodies. This has been achieved through awareness generation workshops which have focussed on building the capacity of community leaders and members of thrift and credit groups.

Meetings with staff from Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) have played a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness of existing sanitation facilities.

A close look at official records indicated that out of 21 *safai karamcharis* who were deputed to the area, only 17 had reported for duty since the settlement of the colony in 1999. Out of these 17, two to three *safai karamcharis* were found to be on leave on a regular basis. The revelation of such official negligence resulted in the transfer of the Assistant Sanitary Inspector.

Below: Training workshops held at Gautampuri were well-attended by the residents. Right: Children played a crucial role in the Zero Waste campaign through their participation in street plays and other activities.



The newly deputed Assistant Sanitary Inspector took an active interest in remodelling the sanitation system. The Municipal staff and NGOs have prepared a list of all *safai karamcharis*. *Gali* (street) representatives have been chosen from every street of the colony and have been introduced to the *safai karamcharis*. These representatives monitor the daily attendance and quality of work of the *safai karamcharis*. Their reports are shared with the Assistant Sanitary Inspector on a weekly basis.

While the blueprint of the area caters for roads, drains, roadside taps for water supply, community toilets, a school compound and a community centre, no place has been designated for something as essential as a community dustbin. Proposals for remodelling the existing community bin and construction of an additional bin in the area have been forwarded to the MCD-Slum wing and MCD-CSE (Conservancy, Sanitation and Engineering) department. The municipality has ensured clearance of collected waste from the community bins thrice every week. A scheme for door-to-door collection of waste has been initiated for which the residents have to make a monthly contribution of Rs 5.

Children from the community, between 6 to 14 years of age, who attend informal education classes at the Arpana Trust's educational centre, have also been enlisted in the Zero Waste Gautampuri campaign.

Representatives from Toxics Link counsel these children twice a week on waste management issues. In order to make them realise that waste is a 'resource', these children have been asked to collect recyclables from their houses and sell them at the



community centre every Sunday. *Kabariwalas* (waste dealers) come to the centre at a specified time on Sundays to purchase the recyclables. This 'pocket money' holds great value for the children. While it educates them about source segregation, it also makes them proud contributors to their family's meagre incomes. Other innovative initiatives with children and the families of Gautampuri-Phase II are in the pipeline.

The empowerment of 4,000 residents of Gautampuri who have been resettled from various slums by the slum-wing of MCD is an inspiring example of people power.

Tanya Sengupta

Centre for Development Communication receives UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour

The Centre for Development Communication (CDC), a Jaipur-based NGO working on solid waste management and upliftment of the urban poor, was awarded the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award, 2004.

The award recognises CDC's model of community awareness for sustainable waste management. CDC is the first organisation in India which has implemented city-wide garbage collection, street sweeping, and transportation of waste for disposal and recycling.

At the heart of the CDC model are waste pickers who have so far been part of the informal recycling industry. In India, ragpickers spend most of their time rummaging through filthy waste bins with bare hands, only to be rewarded with meagre incomes and negligible social recognition.

CDC has transformed the lives of many ragpickers by employing them for its door-to-door garbage collection programme. The waste collectors – called *mitras* (friends) – are offered dignified working conditions at CDC, as a result of which they are viewed with greater respect by the community. Regular payment provides them financial stability and improved health conditions. Interestingly, at CDC, the number of female



ragpickers equals male workers.

CDC provides door-to-door collection of segregated waste in specially designed, two-chambered tricycles. Organic waste goes for vermi-composting while the recyclables are taken to recycling units. Following this method, CDC has been able to divert more than 70% waste from dumpsites/landfills and use it as a resource. CDC's door-to-door collection of segregated waste is also one of the requirements of the Supreme Court ruling under the Municipal Solid Waste Rules, 2000, which many of the municipalities are yet to comply with.

CDC was first noticed for its work in improving the living conditions of slum dwellers in Jaipur. The programme of daily door-to-door collection of municipal solid waste was initiated in 1997 in Jaipur with 2,000 houses. At present, CDC is working in six cities of India, catering to nearly 2 million households.

Following its success in Jaipur, many cities in India have hired CDC's services to deal with their waste. CDC has recently implemented door-to-door collection of garbage in the city of Nagpur, Maharashtra. It has also undertaken the sweeping of 200 km of road in the main city. For this, it employs about 2,500 persons, mostly the urban poor, including waste pickers.

CDC's innovative waste collection programme has not only improved the environment of various cities, but has also brought respectability and improved living conditions for the urban poor.

CDC is one of the prominent members of the Alliance for Waste Management (AWM).

Sanjay K. Gupta

Round-table meeting makes important recommendations for immunisation waste

India's immunisation programme, the largest in the world, is a cause of concern due to the quantity of waste that it generates. The programme is set to receive a shot in the arm with the introduction of auto-disable (AD) syringes. While these syringes will undoubtedly make the injections administered safer, they will also result in mounds of waste that will need to be disposed of safely.

A recent round-table meeting on 'Immunisation Waste Disposal' was held on August 19, 2004, at the India Habitat Centre. The meeting was attended by the Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, as well as by representatives from the World Health Organization, World Bank, Health Care Without Harm, Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), USAID, government officials and several other medical professionals. Here are some of the recommendations made at the meeting:

▲ The needle should be separated from the plastic syringe at the point of administration of the vaccine, using a needle cutter or a needle puller. It is preferable that a needle cutter be used as it cuts the hub of the plastic syringe and not the metal needle alone. The equipment needs to be standardised

to ensure that it functions for an effective period of time.

▲ The syringes should be disposed in syringe pits at Primary Health Centres (PHCs). The syringe pit should be simple to construct and should follow the procedures for disposal.

▲ The plastic portion of the syringe should be disinfected as well. A study should be carried out to determine if the plastic portion is actually infectious or not, since some experts have expressed an opinion that these may not require disinfection.

▲ The AD syringes should be introduced in a phased manner. This would enable learning from mistakes as well as ensure proper implementation, and minimise resistance on the ground. However, some experts prefer that the government buy AD syringes for the entire country and ask each state constituency to training the medical staff on their use. Another option would be to ask manufacturers to produce posters and leaflets, which depict the correct procedure for using auto-disable syringes.

▲ As the demand for such equipment is likely to increase, a product group should be formed by the Ministry of Health and Family Planning. The

product group would look at all issues related to specifications, regulatory issues, occupational safety concerns, supply and cost, standardisation, etc, and would draw up a realistic time frame for equipment supply.

Ratna Singh



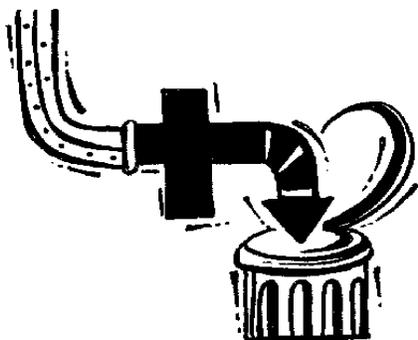
UPDATES

MEDICAL WASTE UPDATE

Chennai wakes up to medical waste management system

Recently, a portion of a severed human limb found its way into a Chennai corporation garbage lorry which was carrying waste from the Royapettah Government Hospital. Though the hospital authorities say that this is untrue, and that the media has blown the issue out of proportion, the fact of the matter is that the situation in Chennai's government hospitals is far from satisfactory.

Concerned by this episode, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) decided to implement bio-medical waste management in government healthcare institutions. TNPCB requested the Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) and Toxics Link (Chennai) to conduct an audit of hospitals to assess the situation. Subsequently, TNPCB requested that a training programme for 18 healthcare institutes be conducted in Chennai.



The training was carried out in consultation and collaboration with Srishti, the Toxics Free Health Care programme of Toxics Link. It laid emphasis on the Bio-medical Waste Management and Handling Rules, elaborating how an effective waste management system can be established in hospitals. The training was followed by a tour of Stanley Hospital, which has comparatively better waste management practices than other institutions. The hospital will now be set up as a model for waste management practices and would serve as a demonstration site for other hospitals.

Ratna Singh

POPS UPDATE

Global POPs project gains momentum in the South Asian region

As part of the International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP), activities have gained momentum in the South Asia region, with several civil society organisations showing interest in participating in the project. At present, 12 NGOs from six participating countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, are involved in these activities. The task of regional coordination has been entrusted to Toxics Link.

IPEP has a three-fold aim:

- ▲ To encourage and enable NGOs in the region to engage in activities that provide concrete and immediate contributions to various country efforts in preparing for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention.
- ▲ To enhance the skills and knowledge of NGOs to help build their capacity as effective stakeholders in the Convention implementation process.
- ▲ To help establish regional and national NGO coordination and capacity in all the regions of the world in support of longer-term efforts to achieve chemical safety.

The project activities broadly include preparing and disseminating various types of regional and country-specific information, including policy documents about POPs; promoting NGO participation in the National Implementation Plan (NIP) preparation processes in their respective countries; increasing the awareness, understanding, and knowledge of civil society regarding the ill-effects of POPs and the measures required to reduce and eliminate them; and fostering an active and expanded interest in, and capacity and competence among NGOs and civil society organisations in POPs-related issues. Some of these initiatives have already been put into action.

The first Regional Hub meeting took place in Pakistan on December 7 and 8, 2004. Delegates deliberated on the pressing POPs issues in the region and chalked out a plan of action for the future.

Upasana Choudhry

E-WASTE UPDATE

Working group to regulate e-waste in India



A national workshop on e-waste was organised by the Central Pollution Control Board in collaboration with Toxics Link and GTZ (German Technical Corporation) on March 15, 2004.

The workshop led to the formation of a working group on e-waste consisting of regulatory agencies, NGOs, industry associations/representatives, experts in the field and recyclers proposing to set up state-of-the-art recycling facilities.

The working group will look into the desirability of continuing with the present system of e-waste collection in the informal sector. The group will also look at upgrading current recycling practices, the evolution of standards for recycling operations and fiscal incentives to promote recycling.

In the context of Extended Producer Responsibility, the group will assess the suitability and need for legislation with regard to buy-back schemes, fixed recycling price, flexible refund schemes and responsibilities of various stakeholders – end users, recyclers, manufacturers and e-waste collectors.

The working group will also begin a dialogue with relevant industries to encourage them to move towards cleaner production technologies, and to eliminate the use of hazardous substances such as cadmium, mercury, hexavalent chromium and halogenated flame-retardants from electronic products.

The group has proposed steps to check illegal import of e-waste and also wants to put a check on problems posed by the significant presence of non-branded products, particularly in the PC segment.

Kishore Wankhede

Miranda House close to being a zero-waste campus

The Zero Waste project at Miranda House, New Delhi, has gained momentum with the construction of 12 compost pits for green waste and three compost barrels for canteen waste.

Over the last three months, Toxics Link has conducted several training workshops for gardeners, canteen employees, students and the faculty in-charge. The workshops on composting methods have been well received by the target audience. 'Miranda House Vātavarān', an environmental group of the college, has added to the initiative by performing a play on segregation, composting and recycling for a zero waste campus. Different methods of composting were explained in a step-wise procedure to the gardeners. The pit and barrel composting is carried out through Effective Microorganisms (EM), since procuring cow dung is a little difficult.

In the absence of a full-time worker, the pits are maintained only once a week. The college intends filling this gap by employing someone full-time to look after the compost pits and barrels. Meanwhile, a person from Toxics Link makes weekly visits to monitor the project.

Sanjay K. Gupta and Linthoi

Eco-clubs bring students closer to the environment

In a heartening development, 1,500 schools in Delhi have formed Eco-clubs to teach youngsters the importance of personal and environmental hygiene. The school authorities believe that the environment can be protected only by instilling a sense of ownership for it in Generation Next.

Plantation drives, setting up of paper recycling units and on-site composting of organic and horticultural waste are some of



the initiatives taken up by these eco-clubs.

Toxics Link has conducted various training workshops and exposure visits for members of such eco-clubs. Recently, Community Aid and Sponsorship Programme (CASP), invited Toxics Link to conduct training workshops for students of two senior secondary schools in Kalkaji, New Delhi. More than 200 middle and high school students attended each workshop, which were conducted separately for girls and boys.

The participants were educated about a city's complete waste cycle – from generation to disposal of waste. Open-house discussions gave the students an opportunity to clarify their doubts. The format included quiz competitions on environmental issues. The sessions were met with a positive response from the faculty as well.

Though the efforts at these two senior secondary schools are in their nascent stage, the coordinators are hopeful that by organising such sessions, students would be motivated to do something positive for their immediate environment.

Tanya Sengupta

HAZARDOUS WASTE UPDATE

SCMC rejects DPCC's idea of hazardous waste disposal site in Wazirpur

It seems that hazardous waste generating units in the capital will have to wait longer for the proper disposal of their waste. During a meeting held on October 4, 2004, the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee (SCMC) rejected the Delhi Pollution Control Committee's idea of a temporary waste disposal site in Wazirpur.

"Wazirpur is a low-lying area – it gets flooded during the rainy season. The implications of such a waste disposal site, that stores hazardous waste, could be disastrous. Also, it is next to a residential area and a railway line. It does not make any sense," said a member of the SCMC sub-committee.

In any case, the area is barely 1 hectare in size and would fill up within six months, after which the situation would be back to square one.

Kishore Wankhede

NEWS

Study links cancer in Bhatinda villagers to pesticide use

The increasing incidence of cancer in about 100 villages in and around Talwandi Saboo in Bhatinda district of Punjab has received much attention in the last couple of years. The issue was first highlighted by a local social welfare group, Kheti Virasat, which conducted two studies, one on its own and another in collaboration with Greenpeace India. These studies cited pesticide residues in drinking water as the main reason for the increasing incidence of cancer in the region.

In response to the stir generated by these findings, the State government sanctioned studies of its own. The Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB), the Health Department and the Faridkot Medical College conducted three independent surveys. However, none of these surveys showed any significant increase in the number of cancer cases.

Widespread dissatisfaction over these surveys, especially among the opposition parties, led to the Chief Minister of Punjab visiting the region and recommending an extensive survey by the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Research, (PGIMER) Chandigarh.

The PGIMER study, conducted under the Head of Department of Community Medicine, Prof Rajesh Kumar, backs the findings of the earlier studies conducted by Kheti Virasat.

The study compared Talwandi Saboo, in Bhatinda district, with an area where use of pesticides has been controlled, Chamkaur Sahib in Ropar, Haryana. The study took into account data for the last 10 years (1993-2003) and covered 85,315 people in Talwandi Saboo and 97,928 in Chamkaur Sahib.

The age-adjusted death rate due to cancer per lakh of the population per year was 51.2 at Talwandi Saboo, as compared to 30.3 in Chamkaur Sahib. Age-adjusted prevalence of confirmed cancer cases per lakh was 125.4 in Talwandi Saboo and 72.5 in Chamkaur Sahib. The crude death rate due to cancer in Talwandi Saboo was

4.48 per 1,000 as compared to 3.69 in Chamkaur Sahib. The six most common types of cancer in the categories of confirmed cases were those of the breast, uterus, blood and other fluids (leukaemia/lymphoma), oesophagus, skin and ovaries.

The study also found presence of arsenic, chromium, nickel and iron in the groundwater at Talwandi Saboo and Chamkaur Sahib. The tap water also showed the presence of chromium, mercury and high levels of iron.

Arsenic, chromium and mercury are known carcinogens. Heptachlor is a known carcinogen found in groundwater and tap water in both places. In samples of vegetables, pesticide residues like heptachlor, chlopyrifos, aldrin, heptachlor endoepoxide, alpha-endosulfan, dieldrin, alpha HCH were found in Talwandi Saboo. In Chamkaur Sahib heptachlor, chlorpyrifos, beta HCH, gamma HCH, and delta HCH were detected.

The earlier reports of Kheti Virasat and the subsequent findings of PGI, Chandigarh, attribute the reason for increasing number of cancer cases to the high usage of pesticide at Talwandi Saboo. Farmers in these villages have changed their traditional cultivation methods and now largely grow rice and cotton, both of which are known to require extensive pesticides.

However, these findings need to be considered from other angles as well. A probable causative factor could be the presence of two major thermal power plants, namely, the Guru Nanak Dev and the Guru Hargobind Thermal Power Plants, in Lehara Mohabbat, Bhatinda.

Since coal is the major fuel source in both these thermal power plants, large quantities of fly ash are generated by them. Previous experiences with fly ash contamination show that it contains heavy metals and sometimes arsenic, hence it is probable that aerial deposition and the eventual leaching of these components may have resulted in the contamination of the groundwater.

At the same time, the changing lifestyle patterns of the population in Talwandi Saboo also need to be taken into account. It should also be determined whether the confirmed cancer patients had a history of smoking and alcohol consumption.

Source: Indian Express, August 27, 2004

NGOs seek recognition for waste pickers

Four prominent organisations, Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat, Stree Mukti Sanghatna, Waste-wise, Chintan and Toxics Link met in Pune on October 28, 2004, to discuss the displacement of waste pickers due to various privatisation schemes of municipalities. As an outcome of the meeting, these organisations have come up with recommendations for integrating waste pickers into the formal system and providing social and legal recognition for their work.

Waste pickers manage 10-15 per cent of the total municipal waste generated. A recycling industry also thrives on the recovery of materials by these waste pickers. In spite of their crucial contribution towards the waste management of the municipalities, however, they are grossly neglected.

While the issue of integrating waste pickers into the formal sector of solid waste management has been taken up in many cities by NGOs, a policy decision in this regard is lacking. In fact, new models of waste management being proposed by various municipalities will only displace them instead of integrating them.

Concerned by this approach, non-profit organisations have asked for an urgent review of the situation. Efforts are also on to establish a lobby at the local and national level that would be instrumental in integrating the informal sector with the formal sector. Provision of permanent status for the workers is the unanimous plea of organisations working on this aspect.

The recommendations of the organisations will be presented to the Supreme Court Committee looking into the amendments of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Rules, 2000.

Sanjay K. Gupta and Linthoi



Delhi hospitals begin mercury phase-out



Some prominent hospitals in Delhi have woken up to the hazards of mercury and are planning to phase out mercury-based equipment. Max Healthcare, one of the country's premier healthcare chains, has decided to replace mercury-based thermometers and blood pressure units in all its hospitals with alternate equipment.

St Stephen's Hospital, a leading hospital in Delhi, has been using digital thermometers for the last two years. It now plans to completely eliminate mercury from the institution by 2005.

Sir Ganga Ram Hospital has also decided to make itself a mercury-free zone. Some other prominent hospitals, such as Holy Family and Batra Hospital, are reviewing their purchase policy regarding mercury-containing equipment. These hospitals are already conducting their own mercury awareness campaigns.

Toxics Link's report titled *Lurking Menace: Mercury in the Healthcare Sector*, released in June 2004, had revealed the threat of mercury-based instruments. At risk are healthcare workers and patients alike, on account of the faulty handling and disposal of mercury during routine equipment breakages in medical establishments.

Mercury equipment breaks very often in hospitals and the staff is ill-trained and ill-equipped to deal with such spillages. The chemical is usually handled without any protective gear and is disposed of either with incinerable waste, general waste or in the drains, all of which lead to its entry into the food chain.

Priti Mahesh

RESOURCES

TRAINING MANUAL ON BIO-MEDICAL WASTE

Srishti, the Toxics Free Health Care programme of Toxics Link, is producing a training manual on bio-medical waste management issues, targetted at healthcare workers. The manual is being produced to provide an up-to-date training resource that will allow trainers to enhance awareness on waste management and related issues at every level in their organisation.

The manual will have six sections, and contain a CD with slide presentations on the topics covered in these sections. Descriptive notes have been provided with the slides to help trainers with a narrative structure.

To book your copies of the manual, please write to anu@toxicslink.org

WHO POLICY SHEET OUTLINES STRATEGIES FOR MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

The Policy Paper released by World Health Organization (WHO), August 2004, on safe healthcare waste management recognises the fact that healthcare waste such as infectious waste, sharps waste, etc, pose a great risk to public health. In addition to health from infectious agents, long-term low-level exposure of humans to dioxins and furans may lead to impairment of the immune system and impaired development of the nervous system, the endocrine system and the reproductive functions. Short-term high-level exposure may result in skin lesions and altered liver function.

In view of the challenge represented by healthcare waste and its management, WHO proposes to work in collaboration with countries through various strategies. Its short-term strategies include production of all syringe components made of the same

plastic to facilitate recycling; selection of PVC-free medical devices; identification and development of recycling options wherever possible; and promotion of alternatives to incineration.

The policy sheet includes medium-term strategies that include efforts to reduce the number of unnecessary injections; research into health effects of chronic exposure to low levels of dioxins and furans; and risk assessment to compare the health risks associated with incineration and exposure to healthcare waste.

The prominent long-term strategies in the policy paper include support to countries in developing a national guidance manual for sound management of healthcare waste; support to countries in the development and implementation of a national plan, policies and legislation on healthcare waste; promotion of the principles of environmentally sound management of healthcare waste as set out in the Basel Convention; and support to allocate human and financial resources to safely manage healthcare waste in countries.

NEW ENVIRONMENTAL GRANTS FUND LAUNCHED



The Environmental Grants Fund (EGF) has been instituted by the Just Environment Trust (JET) to address issues concerning environmental justice in India. The Fund hopes to deal with the disjoint between the human rights movement and the environmental movement. Environmental racism is a common feature and the worst

effected by the existing environmental injustice are the poor and marginalised communities.

The Environmental Grants Fund aspires to bridge the existing gap and encourage new ways of thinking and bring new perspectives to the issue of environment, which it shall accomplish through its small grants and fellowship programmes to individuals and grassroot organisations in India.

Further details on EGF, including information for applicants on how to apply, can be accessed online at www.egfindia.org after January 1, 2005.

JEEVIKA DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION BY CENTRE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

The Centre for Civil Society (CCS) has launched *Jeevika*, a competition on livelihood documentary films. *Jeevika* is a search for documentaries that focus on restrictions – legal, regulatory, bureaucratic, social, cultural and religious – that prevent people from earning an honest living.

While the competition is open to all, young filmmakers are particularly encouraged to participate. The film can be in any format, of any length and in any language, but must carry English subtitles.

The last date for submission of entries is December 20, 2004. The prize ceremony and screenings will be held on January 27-29, 2005 at the India Habitat Centre, Delhi. The first prize is Rs 45,000, the second is Rs 30,000 and the third is Rs 20,000. A best student film award of Rs 10,000 will also be given.

CCS will purchase multiple copies of winning entries for dissemination to educational institutions and NGOs. Those interested, please visit www.ccsindia.org/jeevika.htm for the entry form and resource material on livelihood issues.

FACT FILE

Food (not) for health

Fast-food outlets account for roughly half of all restaurant revenues in the United States. Being aggressively promoted, the growth of fast-foods has been more rapid in developing countries, replacing home cooked traditional diets. Fast-food recipes are a combination of sodas, burgers and other highly processed and standardised items high in fat, sugar and salt, known to fuel a global epidemic of obesity, diabetes and other chronic illnesses.

Did you know?

- ▲ At many fast-food restaurants, a single meal gives a disproportionate share – sometimes more than 100% – of the recommended daily intake of fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar.
- ▲ While a quarter of India's population remains under-nourished – a number virtually unchanged over the past decade – India's fast-food industry is growing by 40% a year and is expected to generate over a billion dollars in sales by 2005.
- ▲ A recent study showed that children who drink sodas and other sugar-sweetened drinks are more often obese and that this risk increases another 60% with each additional

beverage consumed.

- ▲ According to the Independent Nutrition Foundation of India, among high-income Indians, 50% of women and 32% of men are obese.
- ▲ Obesity is the cause of 300,000 premature deaths in the USA every year and results in \$117 billion worth of annual medical bills.
- ▲ Dr John Reid, Health Secretary, Britain, had been expected to propose a ban on advertising of junk food on television during children's programming, in response to the increasing incidence of obesity.
- ▲ Fast-food advertising in vending machines in schools has been banned in Scotland. The move has been hailed as a breakthrough in the fight against child obesity.
- ▲ Studies conducted at the Sitaram Bhattia Institute of Science and Research (SBISR), and Department of Gastroenterology and Human Nutrition at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) show that a majority of school-going children belonging to affluent schools in Delhi are overweight.

Source – Good Stuff,
The World Watch Institute, 2004
Compiled by **Ruchita Khurana**



E-toxic listserve

Toxics Link coordinates an electronic discussion group for sharing and disseminating information. If you would like to join the group, please e-mail us at tdelhi@toxicslink.org

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Quotes from the Earth

Quotes from the Earth is a compilation of films on the themes of Hunger, Water and Survival. To screen the films in your city, please get in touch with Ruchita Khurana at ruchita@toxicslink.org. The films are available against a nominal security deposit. You can view details about the films at www.toxicslink.org/earthquotes/