



Toxics Link

“We are a group of people working together for environmental justice and freedom from toxics. We have taken it upon ourselves to collect and share information about the sources and dangers of poisons in our environment and bodies, as well as about clean and sustainable alternatives for India and the rest of the world.”

Toxics Link, a not-for-profit initiative of The Just Environment Charitable Trust based in New Delhi, India, emerged from a critical need to address a vacuum that existed on **the issue of toxicity** and its impact on life and environment. Toxicity has significant **health and environment impacts**, particularly on vulnerable social groups such as women, young people and the urban poor. The cross-sectoral nature of the issue entails engagement with **a range of concerns**, such as health, environment, occupational safety, social justice, choice of technologies and process, consumer awareness, etc.

Since its conception in 1994, Toxics Link's role has revolved around the basic function of **generating and disseminating credible information** on waste and toxic substances across diverse social, economic and political groupings. The focus on information and communication, though, would have remained incomplete without the logical extension of **fostering change through consensus-based alternatives** towards cleaner, safer and toxics-free practices and approaches. Often, the organisation has implemented **best-practice models**, besides promoting concepts and ideas of change.

A guiding strategic outlook is of approaching each engagement as **an integrating exercise**, which **brings together stakeholders** on the basis of credible research and accurate information. Government agencies, communities and the larger sector itself are important participants in this **dialogue for an equitable and safe environment**. From policy-makers to grassroot activists and from housewives to experts, Toxics Link has established an **extensive outreach** by employing a **diverse range of communication platforms and strategies**.

Toxics Link has been playing a vital role in **connecting experts, civil society groups and individuals** working nationally and internationally on issues related to toxics, both to each other as well as to other sectors. The organisation has forged a

national network of over 1,600 individuals and group members to share the vision of a toxics-free world. Through these, and through its nodes in Mumbai and Chennai, the group has not only pioneered campaigns and facilitated changes at the national and regional levels, but has also emerged as the voice of the global south in international discourses on toxicity and equity. Today, these discussions have come to be integrated into the broader discourse of sustainable development.



Historically, the organisation has developed expertise in the management of municipal, medical and hazardous waste. With the changing interface between man and the environment, new issues like electronic waste, mercury and heavy metals have also been taken up. As a part of several key global alliances, issues of pesticides and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and food safety, among others, have seen us enrich international forums with vital inputs from transitional economies.

Toxics Link attempts to continuously assess the issue of toxicity as it plays out on the ground in everyday life. This allows creation of new researched information that is dynamic and result-oriented.

Toxics-Free Health Care

Among Toxics Link's earliest involvements was work in bio-medical waste, an area which had largely been unaddressed during India's move towards modernity. A successful campaign orchestrated by the organisation resulted in the framing of the nation's first legislation on the issue – the Bio-medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998.

It's a daunting field of work. Health care has many lacunae in the world's second

most populous nation, with basic aspects such as adequate medical staff, infrastructure and availability of medicines yet to be fully addressed. In such a scenario, waste management often takes a low priority. The nature of bio-medical waste, with its multiple sources, coupled with low awareness and knowledge amongst stakeholders have made its management complex and difficult.

Toxics Link has been working towards making health-care delivery hazard-free by replacing toxic products, processes and technologies by cleaner and safer non-burn medical waste treatments technologies, combined with waste segregation at source.



CURRENT FOCUS

Multi-pronged activities like research, policy campaigns, training and capacity-building for implementation of waste management systems are under way. A core campaign aims at the elimination of mercury and adoption of alternatives in health-care institutions. Toxics Link is involved in engaging medical staff and hospital administrations to create models and bodies of information on perspectives and challenges.

Communities and Waste

Toxics Link's strategy in developing community waste management systems follows the key waste management principles of the 4 'R's'-Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Responsibility. The 'zero waste approach' has helped develop sustainable decentralised waste management practices based on segregation, composting and recycling recovery. Such measures have reduced waste going to the landfill by more than 70 per cent, providing long-term sustainable solutions for communities. The Communities and Waste team is engaged in applying theoretical knowhow into ground-level initiatives.

CURRENT FOCUS

On-the-ground project implementation; research on existing community waste management systems; sustainable alternatives applying product life cycle approach; training and capacity-building; networking and identifying policy linkages.



Clean Industry

The Clean Industry programme works for the elimination of toxic technologies, materials and products through campaigns, networks and awareness building and their replacement with alternatives. Its basic focus entails undertaking research to highlight materials and products from the perspective of toxicity, and facilitating search for cleaner alternatives as well as preventative solutions.

This has seen us intervene in the management of hazardous wastes such as electronic waste, PVC and plastics, asbestos and mercury.

This involves working at the central, state and municipal levels with civil society, media and decision-makers to sensitise all concerned about sustainable waste management, with a focus on toxic technologies and their health impacts.

CURRENT FOCUS

E-waste is an issue that has received great focus in the past few years, through pioneering research studies to map the problem in its totality. A dialogue has been initiated through a multi-stakeholder model for its management.



Chemicals and Health

Chemicals impact our everyday lives often in ways we are not aware of. Information on them is inadequate especially about their impacts on health and the environment. When toxic contaminants, such as pesticides, mercury and others, are released into the environment, their effects on human health and the environment can be profound, some effects spanning several generations and vast geographic distributions.

Through the Chemicals and Health programme, Toxics Link seeks to promote the incorporation of chemical safety issues into the development agenda. Our approach to attaining chemical safety is precautionary, aimed at preventing adverse effects, both short and long-term, to humans and the environment from the production, storage, transportation, use and disposal of these chemicals.



CURRENT FOCUS

Food safety, Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), chemical management and safety, Persistent Toxic Substances (PTS) and pesticides are areas that Toxics Link is currently working on.

Information and Communication

Envisaged as an enabling unit for all the activities that the organisation engages with and responds to in terms of concern, the Information and Communication programme acts as a clearing house for information on toxic substances and toxicity.

Accurate information helps to shape responsible decision-making. Much of the toxics related information available is fragmented and not easily available to civil society at large. The unit utilises an array of communications products, such as publications, newsletters, updates, factsheets, web bulletins, blogs, films and lectures.

CURRENT FOCUS

Developing a line of knowledge products; establishing a guiding role for alternative media implementation work; strengthening the public platform to discuss issues with concerned authorities and also initiate debate on burning issues; creating accessible and integrated information tools for civil society.



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for a toxics-free world

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