

COME JUNE, GROUNDWATER EXTRACTION WILL INVITE A FEE

Relevant for: World & Indian Geography | Topic: Distribution of key natural resources - Water Resources incl. Rivers & related issues in world & India

In a bid to promote conservation of groundwater, the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) has notified a water conservation fee (WCF) that industries will need to pay on groundwater extraction starting from June.

As per the notification, industries extracting groundwater including mining-dewatering units and those that use groundwater for packaged drinking water would also need to apply for a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the government. Individual households that draw groundwater using a delivery pipe of a greater than 1" diameter, too, would need to pay a WCF.

However, the agriculture sector — the largest consumer of groundwater in the country — will be exempt from the fees.

The guidelines would come into force with effect from June 2019 and would apply across the country.

Online NOC process

"The entire process of grant of NOC will be done online through a web based application system of CGA," the Water Resources ministry said in the notification.

The rates, according to a notification by the CGA on Wednesday, would be levied depending on the location of the groundwater extraction point and the amount of water being extracted. The government has a list of groundwater blocks, called assessment blocks. These are classified as 'safe,' 'semi-critical,' 'critical' and 'over-exploited' depending on the groundwater draft.

Drawing up to 20 cubic metres (a cubic metre is 1,000 litres) a day in a 'safe' block would cost a company Rs. 3 per cubic metre. However, extracting 5,000 or more cubic metres a day, at an 'over exploited' block would invite a daily charge in excess of Rs. 100 per cubic metre .

The WCF for residential projects ranges from Rs. 1-2 per cubic metre. The WCF apart, all industrial as well as residential bodies would also need to apply for an NOC.

"These are not water charges but a water conservation fee and will be used for groundwater recharge projects," said K.C. Naik, Chairman, Central Ground Water Board (CGWB).

The rates were decided in consultation with industry, which had "fully supported" the government's assessment of the need to impose charges for drawing groundwater, Mr. Naik added.

Defence establishments and users who don't use electricity to extract water have also been granted exemption from the requirement of obtaining NOCs and having to pay the WCF.

In India, extracted groundwater is mainly used for irrigation and accounts for about 228 BCM (billion cubic metre) — or about 90% of the annual groundwater extraction. The rest, 25 BCM, is drawn for drinking, domestic and industrial uses.

India is the largest user of groundwater in the world, and accounts for about 25% of the global water extraction. The CGWB classifies 6,584 assessment units countrywide. While 1,034 units have been categorised as 'over-exploited,' 253 are termed as 'critical', 681 as 'semi-critical' and 4,520 as 'safe.' The remaining 96 assessment units have been classified as 'saline.'

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