

## States' claim on fighting plastic only strong on paper

While Maharashtra may be gearing up for a stringent ban on plastic, experience from across the country suggests that States' claims on reigning in plastic are stronger on paper than on the ground.

According to the Centre's Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules, 2016, all States have to annually apprise the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the steps taken to reign in plastic use, whether a ban is in force, and the strength and performance of a recycler and waste-processing network. The latest such report — as of July 2016 — notes that only 24 States and Union Territories have complied with these directions. Most States, while claiming a ban, qualify it by saying that the ban is imposed in specific towns or cities. Or that it is focussed on particular categories of plastic. Take Assam. Its performance report states that while there is a "complete ban" on plastic carry bags in Kamrup, Sonitpur, Nalbari, Dibrugarh, it allows the import of "substandard plastic carry bags", provided the Commissioner of Taxes, Assam is informed.

In Gujarat, the estimated plastic waste generation is approximately 2,69,294 tonnes per annum and there are nearly 689 plastic waste recyclers, all of them registered. But only Gandhinagar — the capital city but with less than 4% of neighbouring Ahmedabad's population — has an "explicit" ban on the use of plastic carry bags.

Delhi, which reportedly generates the largest quantity of plastic waste in the country, has not provided information on its plastic management initiatives to the CPCB.

The law requires that all plastic waste recyclers register themselves but there were around 312 unregistered plastic manufacturing/recycling units in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Manipur, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttrakhand and Uttar Pradesh. "...It is observed that most of the States/UTs have not set-up proper monitoring system for use of carry bags as per the specified guidelines. It has been observed that those States/UTs, who have imposed complete ban on use and sale of plastic carry bags, the plastic bags are stocked, sold and used indiscriminately. Besides, substandard carry bags (<50 micron) are used widely in other States/UTs, violating PWM Rules, 2016," the CPCB highlights in the report.

India generates an estimated 32 million metric tonnes of packaging waste each year, of which plastic waste constitutes 16%. But only 60% of the collected plastic waste is recycled.

### Single-use plastics

Around 43% of manufactured plastics are used for packaging, most of it "single-use" plastic. So far, not a single one of the 24 States that report their plastic waste management performance have plans in place to tackle single use plastics.

Independent experts say that while Maharashtra's initiative is laudable, it still hinges on extremely efficient enforcement. "Maharashtra has increased its collection centres in the last three months but the problem remains — what alternatives exist to single use plastics?" said Swati Sambyal who works on waste management policy at the Centre for Science and Environment. "The manpower requirements and enforcement challenges are enormous."

Kerala and Sikkim, according to Ms. Sambyal, are the States with the most creditable plastic waste management policies. "Sikkim has a system of buying back plastic from consumers. Maharashtra needs to implement such a system," she said.

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