

Reducing plastic pollution

The Plastic Waste Management Rules of 2016 are the sharpest prongs in India's legal arsenal against plastic. The most significant aspect of the Rules is that they strengthen the concept of 'extended producers responsibility' whereby plastics manufacturers and retail establishments that use plastic are legally bound to introduce a system of collecting back plastic waste. As an environmentally friendly alternative to plastic does not exist yet, and plastic is too ubiquitous and useful, the country has to move towards a regime where plastic waste is treated and recycled rather than engage in rhetoric about banning the product. The Rules lay down the procedure to do that.

The Rules direct that a plastic waste management fee be collected through pre-registration of the producers, importers of plastic carry bags/multilayered packaging and vendors selling the same, for establishing a waste management system.

Producers, importers and brand owners who introduce plastic carry bags, multilayered plastic sachets, pouches or packaging in the market within a period of six months from the date of publication of these Rules need to establish a system for collecting back the plastic waste generated due to their products.

The Rules envisage promoting the use of plastic waste for road construction, or energy recovery, or waste to oil, etc., and think up ways of gainfully utilising waste and addressing waste disposal.

The Rules also mandate an increase in the thickness of carry bags and plastic sheets from 40 to 50 micron. This would likely increase the cost of plastic bags and restrict vendors from giving away bags for free, thereby reducing waste.

Local bodies and gram panchayats are responsible for implementing and coordinating a waste management system. Retailers or street vendors who sell or provide commodities in plastic carry bags, or multilayered packaging, or plastic sheets or covers made of plastic sheets which are not manufactured, labelled or marked in accordance with these Rules will be fined, the Rules say.

The 2016 Rules laid out that carry bags be explicitly priced but this was deleted via an amendment earlier this year. This amendment also provides for a centralised registration system. The Rules also lay down that any mechanism for registration should be automated and should take into account ease of doing business for producers, recyclers and manufacturers.

The centralised registration system will be evolved by the Central Pollution Control Board for the registration of the producer/importer/brand owner.

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This refers to the tendency to form friendships and other forms of interpersonal relationships with people we come across often in our daily lives.

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