

FROM JULY 1, HIMACHAL TO BUY BACK SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Pollution - Air, Water, Soil & E-waste

Novel programme: The government is implementing the scheme in 3,000 eco-club schools. Special arrangement SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

As the Centre has decided to ban the use of single-use plastic from July 1, the hill State of Himachal Pradesh is all set to kick-start a buy-back scheme in schools and colleges to purchase the single-use plastic items from students in a bid to instil a sense of environment preservation by “catching them young”.

Under the novel scheme, the students would be encouraged to bring single-use plastic items from their home and deposit it with the school, for which they will be paid Rs. 75 a kg by the government.

“Across the State, we have 3,000 eco-clubs in schools and in 100 colleges under the National Green Corps programme — these eco-clubs are an association of student-teachers that work to inculcate environmental awareness and protection. As a pilot project, we will start the buy-back scheme in 100 schools from July 1. Later, we will scale it up and implement the scheme in all the schools and colleges through the eco-clubs. We will pay the students Rs. 75 a kg for the single-use plastic items they bring. The purpose is to catch the students in their early years and teach them about environmental conservation. We believe that once a habit towards environment protection is inculcated during childhood it could stay lifelong,” Lalit Jain, Director, Environment, Science-Technology and Member Secretary, Himachal Pradesh Council for Science, Technology and Environment (HIMCOSTE), told *The Hindu*.

The HIMCOSTE is the State nodal agency for the National Green Corps — Eco-club Programme of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Government of India — and is implementing the national scheme in 3,000 eco-club schools and 100 colleges in Himachal Pradesh.

Besides the students, the scheme also aims to involve teachers, school management committees and parents by creating awareness surrounding the ill-effects of plastic waste at the district-level through the eco-club schools, covering both rural and urban schools.

“The single-use plastic items collected from the schools would then be handed over to the Public Works Department and this plastic will be used in bitumen to construct roads in the State. The roads built with plastic-bitumen are durable and long-lasting, besides it would help to dispose of the waste plastic,” said Mr. Jain.

At Senior Secondary School in Shimla district’s Theog, Deepak Sharma, in charge of the school eco-club, is enthused by the new scheme to be launched. “We are hopeful that monetary assistance offered by the government will motivate students and teachers to bring the single-use plastic items to school for their disposal. At our school, we have been making students and the local community aware of the ill-effects of plastic, single-use plastic in particular. To curtail plastic use, we encourage the use of steel bottles for carrying drinking water to the school. We have already been organising inter-house competitions in the school. In the first week of June, the students held an awareness rally at Theog market to highlight the dangers of plastic on the environment, conveying the proper use of plastic and avoiding its littering. Making use of social

media platforms, we show students motivational videos on nature conservation and biodiversity.”

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