

BRING DOWN BENZENE EMISSION AT FUEL OUTLETS, SAYS PANEL

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Green concern: Fuel stations are a major source of emission, according to the National Green Tribunal. K. Murali Kumar

A joint committee appointed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to study air pollution in the State has recommended the installation of vapour recovery system at fuelling stations and retrofitting of diesel vehicles with particulate filters to improve air quality.

The report submitted before the Southern Bench of the tribunal pointed out that petrol refuelling stations were a major source of benzene emissions, volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter 2.5 concentration. "Therefore, installation of vapour recovery system is an important step in improving air quality. This is to be implemented in coordination with the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization [PESO] shortly," it said.

The joint committee comprises officials of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Central and State Pollution Control Boards, and the CSIR-National Environment Engineering Research Institute, Chennai. The committee was directed to assess the ambient air quality levels in the State, especially in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kochi, Alappuzha, Kozhikode, Thrissur, Kasaragod, and Kannur.

The committee recommended stringent action against industrial units that do not comply with emission standards. The Pollution Control Board had already issued circulars suggesting retrofitting of emission control devices of generators and replacing diesel generators by gas-based generators. Other recommendations include promoting battery-operated vehicles, ban on old diesel vehicles in a phased manner, greening of open areas, and creation of green buffers along traffic corridors.

The short-term measures recommended include strict action against visibly polluting vehicles (to be initiated by the Motor Vehicles Department), introduction of wet / mechanised vacuum sweeping of roads, controlling dust pollution at construction sites, and ensuring transport of construction materials in covered vehicles.

The tribunal has asked the committee to assess the air quality in the post-pandemic phase to study the scenario when activities are expected to peak. The committee has said that the study could be held in June, anticipating that educational institutions may reopen, and public transport will return to normal.

A report points out that petrol refuelling stations are a major source of benzene emissions and volatile organic compounds.

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