

‘IN URBAN U.P., 87% OF WASTE FROM TOILETS GOES TO RIVERS, FARMLANDS’

Relevant for: Health, Education & Human Resources | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

While urban Uttar Pradesh has an 80% coverage of toilets, inefficient sanitation systems ensure that almost 87% of the excreta being generated by these toilets is being dumped in waterbodies or agricultural lands, according to a new analysis of 30 cities by the Centre for Science and Environment.

“With 2019 just round the corner, the number of toilets and onsite sanitation systems being built in the State are all set to increase exponentially — if not managed scientifically and sustainably, the amount of faecal sludge that these new toilets will generate will swamp the State,” said Suresh Rohilla, programme director of waste and wastewater management at the CSE.

The report, released on Monday, argues that building more toilets will only worsen the environmental, sanitation and manual scavenging situation, unless sewerage connections increase from the current 28% of households in the 30 cities studied. Onsite sanitation systems — such as septic tanks or pit latrines — are far more prevalent, and are used by 47% of households.

Manual scavengers

Without a sewerage system, the effluent from the septic tank, along with greywater from the kitchen and bathroom flows out into stormwater drains and open drains or nullahs. The faecal sludge, on the other hand, has to be periodically emptied from the septic tank, either manually or mechanically using vacuum trucks or tankers. CSE’s analysis found that half of all emptying work in these cities is done manually, despite the legal prohibition of the employment of manual scavengers.

“As there is no designated site for disposal, the emptied faecal sludge ends up in open drains/nullahs/open fields, which eventually lead to polluting the Ganga and other rivers and surface water bodies,” said the report.

Over a six month period, researchers mapped excreta flow diagrams for 30 cities divided into four clusters by population.

In cities with a population over 10 lakh, such as Lucknow, Kanpur and Agra, the sewerage system covers 44% of the population. However, only 28% of that wastewater is safely treated. A third of the population is dependent on septic tanks connected to open drains, while 4% of the population still defecate in the open. Overall, 44% of the waste generated is safely treated and managed.

Worse in small cities

The situation is much worse in smaller cities. In cities with a population between five and 10 lakh, more than 70% of the population is dependent on tanks connected to open drains, and only half of them would actually qualify as septic tanks. Of the five cities in this cluster, only Jhansi has a designated disposal site. Overall, only 18% of waste and sludge is safely managed.

In cities with a population between 1.2 lakh and five lakh, only 9% of waste and sludge are safely managed, while in the fourth cluster of cities whose populations are less than 1.2 lakh, that figure drops to a mere 4%.

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