

GOVT. ANNOUNCES PLASTIC WASTE RECYCLING TARGETS

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

Ready for reuse: Bundles of plastic bottles near a recycling unit in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Biswaranjan Rout/BISWARANJANROUT

The Environment Ministry has issued draft rules that mandate producers of plastic packaging material to collect all of their produce by 2024 and ensure that a minimum percentage of it be recycled as well as used in subsequent supply.

It has also specified a system whereby makers and users of plastic packaging could collect certificates — called Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) certificates — and trade in them. The notification was expected to come into force by December 6 and, as of now, was open to public feedback. Only a fraction of plastic that cannot be recycled — such as multi-layered multi-material plastics — would be eligible to be sent for end-of-life disposal such as road construction, waste to energy, waste to oil and cement kilns. Only methods prescribed by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) would be permitted for their disposal.

Plastic packaging, as per the rules made public on October 6, fall into three categories. The first is “rigid” plastic; category 2 is “flexible plastic packaging of single layer or multilayer (more than one layer with different types of plastic), plastic sheets and covers made of plastic sheet, carry bags (including carry bags made of compostable plastics), plastic sachet or pouches; and the third category is called multilayered plastic packaging, which has at least one layer of plastic and at least one layer of material other than plastic.

Producers of plastic would be obliged to declare to the government, via a centralised website, how much plastic they produce annually. Companies would have to collect at least 35% of the target in 2021-22, 70% by 2022-23 and 100% by 2024.

In 2024, a minimum 50% of their rigid plastic (category 1) would have to be recycled as would 30% of their category 2 and 3 plastic. Every year would see progressively higher targets and after 2026-27, 80% of their category 1 and 60% of the other two categories would need to be recycled.

If entities cannot fulfil their obligations, they would on a “case by case basis” be permitted to buy certificates making up for their shortfall from organisations that have used recycled content in excess of their obligation. The CPCB would develop a “mechanism” for such exchanges on an online portal. Non-compliance would not invite a traditional fine. Instead an “environmental compensation” would be levied, though the rules do not specify how much this compensation would be.

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