

AIR Spotlight - Celebrating Clean and Eco-friendly Deepawali

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the topic of discussion is the importance of celebrating a clean Diwali.

Participants:

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Context

- With the rising concerns over air quality in major cities, there is an increasing need for celebrating Diwali in a clean and eco-friendly way.

Pollution and Diwali

- Bursting crackers increases heat and toxic gases in the atmosphere, such as sulphur dioxide (SO₂), carbon dioxide (CO₂), carbon monoxide (CO), and particulate matter (PM) which causes a rise in the temperature of the earth and a general decline in air quality.
- The use of loud crackers has been observed which violates the strict norms of noise pollution as enumerated under the [Environmental Protection Act, 1986](#).
- There has been an increase in the use of single-use plastics as part of the gifts exchanged.

Impacts

- The release of toxic chemicals has particularly affected the elderly population and children by increasing the risks of asthma, chest pain, shortness of breath and even lung cancer. It has reduced life expectancy and undermines the [right to life](#) protected under the Indian Constitution.
- Concerns have also been raised about the use of Child Labour in the fireworks industry which violates the International Labour Standards on Child labour.
- Air quality has been consistently declining in New Delhi with an [AQI](#) of 436. India also has close to 22 out of the 30 most polluted cities in the world.
- Plastics take thousands of years to decompose and end up in the oceans which affect the dissolved oxygen and leads to an increase in the dead zones. It also enters the food chain as microplastics with significant consequences to human health.
- In the winter months, the dispersion of pollutants is also affected due to the prevailing wind conditions. This increases the concentration of the pollutants in the lower levels of the atmosphere.

Green Crackers

- Green crackers are low-emission crackers that are free of harmful chemicals like sulphur nitrates, arsenic, magnesium, sodium, lead, and barium.

- The Supreme Court has allowed the use of green crackers if the air quality is better than “poor”.
- However, these are not completely free of pollution. According to CSIR, **green crackers can only reduce emissions by up to 30% in comparison to regular ones.**
- There has been an increasing trend of greenwashing with emphasis on marketing over the actual reduction in the contributions to air and noise pollution.

Way ahead

- Awareness has to be increased among the consumers about the potential impacts of pollution and the merits of reduced usage of fireworks.
- The regulatory system around the green crackers should be improved to make sure that the reductions in emissions by them are mentioned more transparently.
- Central and state pollution control boards need to ensure that the noise pollution guidelines are adhered to by all the actors involved.
- A shift to eco-friendly and recyclable materials such as flowers, diyas can be used for decorations instead of single-use plastics as part of the Vocal for Local initiative of the Government of India.

Conclusion

- The festival of Diwali is of emotional value irrespective of religious affiliations in India. It is part of the Indian cultural identity. The lighting of Diyas or lamps is also a symbolic fight against the darkness to welcome the light. Environmental sustainability in the practices will ensure that the festival is celebrated in the right spirit.