

Waste Segregation at Source

Waste segregation at source refers to the process of identifying and segregating various types of solid wastes at the place or location of their generation. The management of municipal solid waste in India has continued to be a problem not only because of environmental and aesthetic concerns, but also because of the enormous quantities generated every day.

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) had in 2016 brought the new Solid Waste Management Rules (SWM). It defines segregation as sorting and separate storage of various components of solid waste namely biodegradable wastes including agriculture and dairy waste, non-biodegradable wastes including recyclable waste, non-recyclable combustible waste, sanitary waste and non-recyclable inert waste, domestic hazardous wastes, and construction and demolition wastes.

The Fundamental Duties enshrined in the Constitution of India, under Article 51-A provide for duties of citizens for protection and improvement of the natural environment.

Why is waste segregation at source important?

The government in recent months has promoted PPP mode for the investment and technological efficiency in waste management in our country. Further, there are proposals to ban plastic stick seven in small children's toys, ice cream's and candles, as they produce non-biodegradable waste.

What are the rules for waste segregation at source?

- The Solid Waste Management Rules have mandated the source segregation of waste to channelize the waste to wealth by recovery, reuse and recycling.
- The new rules are applicable beyond municipal areas.
- It includes urban agglomerations, census towns, notified industrial townships, areas under the control of Indian Railways, airports, special economic zones, places of pilgrimage, religious and historical importance, and State and Central Government organizations in their ambit.

- Waste generators would now have to segregate waste into three streams- Biodegradable, Dry (Plastic, Paper, Metal, Wood) and Domestic Hazardous waste (diapers, mosquito repellents, cleaning agents) before handing it over to the collector.

What are the Provisions for the Large Waste Generators?

- Institutional generators, market associations, event organisers and hotels and restaurants are directly responsible for segregation and sorting the waste and managing partnerships with local bodies.
- In case of an event, or gathering of more than 100 persons at any licensed/ unlicensed place, the organiser will have to ensure segregation of waste at source and handing over of segregated waste to waste collectors or agencies, as specified by the local authority.
- All hotels and restaurants will also be required to segregate biodegradable waste and set up a system of collection to ensure that such food waste is utilised for composting / bio-Examination.
- The rules mandate that all resident welfare and market associations and gated communities with an area of above 5,000 sq m will have to segregate waste at the source.

What are the rules for sanitary waste?

- The manufacturers or brand owners of sanitary napkins are responsible for awareness for proper disposal of the waste by the generator.
- They are required to provide a proper disposal mechanism and support system.

What is the collect back scheme for packaging waste?

- Brand owners who sell or market their products in non-biodegradable packaging materials should put in place a system to collect back the packaging waste generated due to their production.

What is the user fees collection concept?

- Under the rules, the local bodies across India have been empowered to fix the users' fees.

- Municipal authorities levy user fees for collection, disposal and processing from bulk generators.
- The generator has to pay a “User Fee” to the waste collector.
- “Spot Fine” for littering and non-segregation, where the quantum is decided by the local bodies.
- Integration of rag pickers, waste pickers and kabadiwalas from the informal sector to the formal sector by the state government is prioritised under the new rules.
- It stipulates zero tolerance for throwing; burning, or burying the solid waste generated on streets, open public spaces outside the generator’s premises, water bodies and drains\

Conclusion

Segregation of waste at the source is a proactive concept, further easing the process of utilizing, converting the waste to various useful products. It leads to a higher recovery of recyclables, further enabling a hygienic environment for handling waste by waste workers. The trend and concepts of Zero Waste and Circular Economy have gained currency and wider support not only in India but also across the world. Major changes and upgrades in technology are certainly required to achieve this. However, the crucial component of low-cost intervention such as the ‘segregation of waste at the source’ can bring about a significant impact on how waste is getting managed.

There are challenges to achieving this ambitious goal. However, better public awareness on the importance of waste segregation, the idea of monetizing the waste needs extensive promotion. The idea of public spaces like the Waste to Wonder themed Park in Gurugram (Haryana), where several sculptures are being made from waste and scrap, should be adopted. It is high time such efforts translated into creative solutions dot the urban landscapes. The policy of Reduce, Reuse, Recover, Recycle, Repair, Refuse and Rethink will give a boost and address the issue by tapping the full potential of the waste.