

PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT

(Frequently Asked Questions)

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(Frequently Asked Questions)

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FAQ – 1

Why can't the government ban the single-use carry bags? Why this extensive 'advice' on shifting to the use of cloth bag, or bags made of eco-friendly materials?

The government has already banned (through Plastic Waste Management Rules – 2016) the manufacturing / sale and use of plastic carry bags of less than 50 microns. That means manufacturing and using single-use plastic carry bags is illegal. It is illegal since March 2016.

FAQ – 2

But, is Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules -2016 applicable to Gram Panchayats also? I am under the impression that it is applicable only to Urban Local Bodies and Municipalities.

Yes. It is. Plastic Waste (Handling and Management) Rules – 2011 that existed earlier did not cover Gram Panchayats. The recent version of it, Plastic Waste Management Rules – 2016 (amended in 2018) is applicable to rural local bodies (Gram Panchayats) also.

FAQ – 3

You are saying that the PWM Rules – 2016 has banned the single-use plastic carry bags. But, when we buy household items from any shop – be it a grocery shop, a vegetable vendor, a fruit stall or even restaurants and eateries – all of them easily give us parcels in use-and-throw carry bags only.

First of all, many people – both the shopkeepers as well as consumers – do not know that it is illegal to give or accept single-use plastic carry bags. We think the advocacy on avoiding use-and-throw carry bags is a piece of advice, like it is said 'plant a tree'. Many do not know that it is illegal. Secondly, the ban is not fully enforced, as yet. Use and throw carry bags are available because you and I happily accept when it is handed to us. So long as there is demand in the market, supply will not stop.

It's like the traffic fine for riding a two-wheeler without wearing a helmet is Rs.1,000 (as per Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019). But you see people wearing helmet only in cities where this act is enforced, or only the days a traffic police squad is serious on duty.

FAQ – 4

If it is illegal / unlawful, how is it easily available all over?

Although the Plastic Waste Management Rules – 2016 is in vogue since March 2016, it is not implemented. It is the local bodies – both urban and rural local bodies – that should implement it, and the respective State Pollution Control Boards should facilitate and monitor. The use-and throw carry bags (of less than 50 microns) that you get in the market are coming from some unlicensed manufacturers. They are made available because they are cheap; and many do not say: ‘no’, when they are handed this piece of garbage [use-and throw carry bag]. We know that demand will generate its own supply – no matter it is legal or illegal. A typical example could be alcohol prohibition and illegal sale of locally brewed liquor.

FAQ – 5

You mentioned that single-use plastic carry bags of less than 50 microns are banned. But, how do I know if a plastic carry bag a shop keeper is giving me is less than 50 microns or more than 50 microns?

All licenced manufacturers shall print on the bag: ‘*Thickness above 50 microns as per the specifications of Plastic Waste Management Rules – 2016*’. If there is no such print, you can take it to mean that it is from some unlicensed manufacturer producing it in some nameless lane. Can you recollect now in how many of the use-and-throw carry bags you accepted last week, you found this printed. Most probably, in none of them, except from some departmental stores that are under constant scanner. Those unlicensed manufacturers [of use-and-throw carry bags] thrive ‘partly’ because you support their business by accepting use-and-throw carry bags every time you are shopping.

FAQ – 6

If plastic carry bags of less than 50 microns are banned in a way means plastic bags of more than 50 microns are allowable. Are they environment friendly?

No. They are not eco-friendly either. An eco-friendly product, which is a complete substitute of the plastic in all uses, has not been found till date. If available, they are not cost-effective. Thus, in the absence of a suitable alternative, it is impractical and undesirable to impose a blanket ban on the use of plastic all over the country. The real challenge is to improve plastic waste management system. For one, plastic carry bags of more than 50 microns are

recyclable, and so rag pickers tend to collect them. Secondly, the cost of these carrybags ranges from Rs.3 to Rs.5/- and so shop keepers cannot afford to give it for free. When it is charged consumers tend to say: 'no'. Consumers make it a point to carry a cloth bag in order to avoid paying extra for the carry bag. In the case of use-and throw plastic bags of less than 50 microns, they are given free of cost. Therefore, it is mostly the single-use carry bags of 20 – 40 microns that we see flying around / floating around / clogging the drainages. This step can considerably 'reduce' such use-and-throw carry bags coming into the environment. All said and done, the best is to 'refuse' any plastic carry bag. As of now, the step we contemplate is at least to 'reduce' until a cost-effective alternative comes in the market.

FAQ – 7

Are 'single-use plastic carry bags', and 'single-use plastics' one and the same?

'Single-use plastic carry bags' are just one in the category of 'single-use plastics'. Single-use plastics - often also referred to as disposable plastics - are commonly used for packaging and include items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. Plastics used in packaging mostly are of single-use. They include: grocery bags, food packaging, plastic water-bottles, straws, single-use coffee stirrers, single use plastic tea cups and plastic cutleries such as spoons, forks, and knives. Such plastics are problematic because they are not biodegradable.

FAQ – 8

So, all these 'single-use plastics' are banned?

No. The ban, as of now, is only about the use-and-throw carry bags of less than 50 microns. The PWM Rules has stipulated that the manufacturers and brand owners of all types of single-use plastics must find acceptable alternatives / or put in place a mechanism to collecting them back and cleaning up the environment by sending them to recyclers. The manufacturers and brand owners must put in place such a system by March 2020 (i.e. two years from the date of release of PWM-Rules – 2016 (as amended in March, 2018).

Plastic material, in any form including Vinyl Acetate - Maleic Acid - Vinyl Chloride Copolymer, shall not be used in any package for packaging gutkha, pan masala and tobacco in all forms.

FAQ – 9

In biscuit packets, chips packets etc. we find one layer of plastic as the main material, in combination with one or more layers of metalized layers, or aluminium foils in the form of laminate. How about such materials?

They do not come under the category of ‘single-use plastics’. They are technically known as ‘multi-layered packaging’ materials. They are co-extruded structures with more than one type of material – used in packaging. These materials are really problematic. PWM Rules says that manufacture and use of non-recyclable multi-layered plastic should register with SPCB within three months of this notification, and phase out use of such plastics within 6 months. Nevertheless, there are innovators, who have demonstrated that these can be converted into long plastic sheets and be reused as car/bus shelters, passenger shelters, temporary shelters in construction sites etc. These can also be used as Refused Derived Fuel (RDF) in cement kilns in place of coal. However, the real problem is about collection because the contamination from the streets and moisture on these materials reduce its calorific value / energy value / usability.

FAQ – 10

How about aluminium foils without any laminates – the ones restaurants use for packing food items?

Hot food items [including tea, coffee] should not be packed in plastics. Such practice can cause cancer. Please realise that if you follow that practice, you are giving yourself slow poison. I understand your question is about aluminium foils used in packing. Yes, aluminium packaging materials are recyclable. But, you do not care to wash them before you discard such materials in the dustbin. People throw away such containers with leftover food items such as *chatnai*, *sambar* etc. They start giving a foul smell before they reach recyclers. The same is the case of with milk pouches also. The recyclers refuse to accept such items because of the contaminants and foul smell. One material can be recycled into another usable material – but not mixed up garbage. Aluminium cans / aluminium foil containers are recyclable. Remember to wash it clean before you discard in the dustbin.

FAQ – 11

In fact, most of these single-use plastics come in the form of ‘packaging materials’ from big corporate companies, besides the shopping bags, straws, multi-layered plastics, and others. Perhaps, that’s what you mean by Brand Owners and Manufacturers of single-use plastics. What are the corporate companies doing about it? Are they not to be held responsible for introducing in the environment huge volumes of plastics – in the form of packaging materials?

The PWM Rules – 2016 stipulates the responsibility of manufacturers, importers and brand owners for environmentally sound waste management practices. They need to establish a system for collecting back the plastic waste generated due to their products. This is called Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). Corporate companies can appoint their representative institutions that shall work with targets to collect back the plastic waste generated by these companies. The plan of collection to be submitted to the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) while applying for establishing business / renewing license, within a year from the date of notification of these rules, and start implementing within two years thereafter.

FAQ – 12

This sounds fine, but is there anything happening about it actually, since it was notified in March 2018?

In Punjab, for instance, about 30 major food companies will launch an initiative with non-profit Punjab Plastic Waste Management Society, to collect MLP waste in the state on October 2. The initiative hopes to clean 95 per cent of the waste in the state by 2022, says the Punjab Pollution Control Board that forged the collaboration. Similar EPR initiatives are being carried out in other states. In Maharashtra, PepsiCo India announced a collaboration with Delhi-based company Gem Enviro to collect and recycle MLP waste and “PET bottles” of any brand. There are newspaper reports that companies such as Amazon, FlipKart, Samsung, RPG Group, Mahindra Group, Godrej Group, Pepsi Co India, Nestle India, Dabur India have started working on EPR appointing agencies on behalf of them to collect back the plastics they introduced in the market. There are several professional waste collection and processing services that work on social enterprise model / business model.

FAQ – 13

What are the Responsibilities of Local Bodies /Gram Panchayats?

The Gram Panchayat shall be the authority for enforcement of these rules. Every Gram Panchayat either on its own or by engaging an agency shall set up, operationalise and coordinate for waste management in the rural area / villages under their control. Their functions include:

- a) Ensuring segregation, collection, storage, transportation, plastic waste and channelization of recyclable plastic waste to recyclers having valid registration; ensuring that no damage it caused to the environment during this process
- b) Creating awareness among all stakeholders and their responsibilities; and
- c) Ensuring that waste is segregated at source, and that open burning of plastic waste does not take place.
- d) Prepare a by-law spelling out specific rules for proper management of waste and regulation of households and institutions within Gram Panchayats. In other words, Gram Panchayats shall to frame bye-laws incorporating the provisions of these rules.
- e) Determine ‘user fees’ for waste collection and management, and levy ‘spot fines’ on households / institutions / restaurants / market association that litter.
- f) The Gram Panchayats, if required shall take the assistance of the District Magistrate or the Deputy Commissioner for enforcement of these rules.

FAQ – 14

What are the Responsibilities of Waste Generators?

Waste generators here include several categories including households, and institutions as you shall find below.

Institutional waste generators, market associations, event organisers are directly made responsible for segregation and sorting the waste and manage in partnership with local bodies. In case of an event, or gathering of more than 100 persons, the organiser will have to ensure segregation of waste at source and handing over of segregated waste to waste collector or agency, as specified by the Gram Panchayat.

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-gas.

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 source into material like

plastic, tin, glass, paper and others and hand over recyclable material either to authorised waste-pickers and recyclers or to the urban local body.

All waste generators shall pay such user fee or charge as may be specified in the bye-laws of the local bodies for plastic waste management such as waste collection or operation of the facility thereof, etc.;

FAQ – 15

What are the Responsibilities of retailers and street vendors?

All retailers and street vendors selling or providing commodities in plastic carry bags or multi-layered packaging covers, which are not manufactured or labelled or marked in accordance with these rules shall be liable to pay such fines / penalties as specified under the bye-law of the local bodies.

FAQ – 16

The Responsibilities of Citizens / Households?

- Stop littering public places. Stop spitting on the roads and in public places
- Refuse generating waste (by carrying your own bag, refusing to take tea / coffee in disposable cups etc.)
- Use your ingenuity and reduce generating waste.
- Segregate waste at the household level and cooperate with the Gram Panchayat in implementing the bye-laws pertaining to waste management at Gram Panchayat level.

FAQ – 17

How do we ensure that PWM Rules are really implemented?

There are reporting requirements that the Government of India has stipulated in the PWM Rules – 2016 that SPCB shall not renew registration of producer unless the producer has an action plan for setting up plastic waste management unit. Every person engaged in recycling or processing of plastic waste shall prepare and submit an annual report in Form – IV to the local body concerned under intimation to the concerned SPCB by the 30th of April every year. Every local body shall submit an annual report in Form –V to the concerned SPCB by 30th June every year. Each SPCB shall submit an annual report in Form VI to the CPCB on the implementation of these rules by the 31st July of every year. The CPCB shall prepare a

consolidated annual report on the status of use and management of plastic waste in various states and forward it to the Government of India along with its recommendations before the 31st August of every year.

Note:

The NIRD&PR, Hyderabad has prepared a Model Bye-law on Solid Waste Management for Gram Panchayats, along with a companion manual titled: Solid Waste Management: A Step by Step Guide for Gram Panchayats.

They are available for download at: http://nirdpr.org.in/nird_docs/sb/sb300818.pdf

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