

INSIGHTS INTO SANSAD TV



SANSAD TV: PERSPECTIVE BAN ON SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InmRaGKel_4

Introduction:

Manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of identified single use plastic items, which have low utility and high littering potential has been banned all across the country from July 1, 2022. This is in line with the clarion call given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to phase out single use plastic items by 2022. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had notified the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021, on 12 August last year.

Guidelines on Extended Producers Responsibility on plastic packaging as

Plastic Waste Management

Amendment Rules were also notified earlier this year on 16th February. For effective enforcement of this ban national and state level control rooms will be set up and special enforcement teams will be formed. States and Union Territories have been asked to set up border check points to stop inter-state movement of any banned single use plastic items. CPCB Grievance Redressal App has also been launched to empower citizens to help curb plastic menace.

Types of plastic (based on size):

- Macro-plastic: 25mm or more
- Meso-plastic: 5mm to 25mm

Micro-plastic: 1 micron (0.001mm) to 5mm

Alternatives:

- Although compostable, biodegradable or even edible plastics made from various materials such as bagasse (the residue after extracting juice from sugarcane), corn starch, and grain flour are promoted as alternatives, these currently have limitations of scale and cost.
- In India in the absence of robust testing and certification to verify claims made by producers, spurious biodegradable and compostable plastics are entering the marketplace.
- In January this year, the CPCB said that 12 companies were marketing carry bags and products marked 'compostable' without any certification, and asked the respective State Pollution Control Boards to take action on these units.

Impacts:

- While it is still unclear, some studies suggest that plastic bags and Styrofoam containers can take up to thousands of years to decompose, contaminating soil and water, and posing significant **ingestion, choking and entanglement hazards** to wildlife on land and in the ocean.

- Due to their light weight and balloon-shaped design, plastic bags are easily blown in the air, eventually ending up on land and in the ocean.
- Styrofoam items contain toxic chemicals such as styrene and benzene. Both are considered carcinogenic and can lead to additional health complications, including adverse effects on the nervous, respiratory and reproductive systems, and possibly on the kidneys and liver.
- Several studies have shown that the toxins in Styrofoam containers can transfer to food and drinks, and this risk seems to be accentuated when people reheat the food while still in the container.
- In low-income regions, domestic waste – including plastics – is often burnt for heating and/or cooking purposes, exposing largely women and children to prolonged toxic emissions.
- Stranded single-use plastics create visual pollution and are increasingly becoming a priority especially in countries that rely heavily on tourism as a major source of GDP, such as Small Island Developing States.
- Styrofoam products present challenging recovery dynamics,

- making recycling – although technically possible – often financially unviable.
 - Because of the porosity of foamed plastic products, cleaning such products, which are often contaminated with food or drinks, is difficult and energy-intensive, further increasing the cost of recycling.
- segregation and collection is the key reason for inefficient plastic waste disposal.
- Small producers of plastics are facing the ban, while more organised entities covered by the Extended Producer Responsibility clause continue with business as usual.

Challenges posed:

- Petroleum-based plastic is **not biodegradable and usually goes into a landfill** where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
 - Plastic in oceans and forests are choking flora and fauna. In fact, plastic trash is expected to exceed the fish population in 2050.
 - Microplastics have ability to enter food chain with the highest concentration of the pollutants.
 - **The PWM Rules Amendment, 2018**, omitted explicit pricing of plastic bags that had been a feature of the 2016 Rules.
 - Waste plastic from packaging of everything from food, cosmetics and groceries to goods delivered by online platforms remains unaddressed.
 - The fast moving consumer goods sector that uses large volumes of packaging, posing a higher order challenge.
- Lack of adequate infrastructure for
- Lack of consultation with stakeholders such as manufacturers of plastics, eateries and citizen groups: This leads to implementation issues and inconvenience to the consumers.
 - Exemptions for certain products such as milk pouches and plastic packaging for food items severely weaken the impact of the ban.
 - No investment in finding out alternative materials to plug the plastic vacuum: Until people are able to shift to a material which is as light-weight and cheap as plastic, banning plastic will remain a mere customary practice.
 - Lack of widespread awareness among citizens about the magnitude of harm caused by single-use plastic: Without citizens ‘buying in’ to a cause, bans only result in creating unregulated underground markets.

- No strategy to offset the massive economic impact: Sweeping bans like the one in Maharashtra are likely to cause massive loss of jobs and disruption of a large part of the economy dependent on the production and use of plastic.

Strengthening waste management systems:

- Better waste management systems with focus on segregation incentive models can help achieve long-term impacts.
- This has value and a market and will not end up as litter. We need to source segregate.

Social engineering:

- Presently, consumer awareness about negative impacts of littering single-use plastics is still limited.
- This further needs to be strengthened through communication, strategic planning and consumer awareness campaigns.
- This will not only improve eco-consciousness among citizens but will also empower and encourage widespread actions.

Way forward:

- Promote alternatives like cotton, **khadi bags and bio-degradable plastics**.
- Provide **economic incentives to encourage the uptake** of eco-friendly and fit-for-purpose alternatives that do not cause more harm. Support can include tax rebates, research and development funds, technology incubation, public-private partnerships, and support to projects that recycle single-use items and turn waste into a resource that can be used again.
- Reduce or abolish taxes on the import of materials used to make alternatives.
- **Provide incentives to industry by introducing tax rebates** or other conditions to support its transition. Governments will face resistance from the plastics industry, including importers and distributors of plastic packaging. Give them time to adapt.

Use revenues collected from taxes or levies on single-use plastics to maximize the public good. Support environmental projects or boost local recycling with the funds. Create jobs in the plastic recycling sector with seed funding.

- Enforce the measure chosen effectively, by making sure that there is clear allocation of roles and responsibilities.
- Monitor and adjust the chosen measure if necessary and update the public on progress.
- **International examples:**
 - The success of imposing a plastic bag fee has also been established in cities like Chicago and Washington, showing that such interventions could be effective in shaping behaviour change.
 - The European Union is mulling new laws to ban some everyday single-use plastic products including straws, cutlery and plates citing plastic litter in oceans as the concern prompting the action.
 - Countries such as the U.S., Canada and the Netherlands have already put in place regulations to stop the use of microbeads in personal-care products. The sooner India adopts such regulations, the better
- **Encouraging plogging:** Picking up litter while jogging or strolling was kick-started on a small scale in a small part of Stockholm about an year ago, it has spread across the globe and India can adopt this as well.