

Standard Guidelines for Single-Use Plastic

Introduction

Plastic is an ubiquitous material. It is lightweight, hygienic and resistant. It can be moulded into different shapes and used in a wide range of applications. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) conducted a study in 60 major cities of India (2012), wherein it has been reported that 4059 Ton of Plastic Waste was generated each day from these cities. The fraction of plastic waste in total Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) ranges from 3.10% (Chandigarh) to 12.47% (Surat). Average plastic waste generation is around 6.92% of MSW. With extrapolation of per capita plastic waste generation, it is estimated that 9.46 million tons per annum of plastic waste is generated in India, which is approximately 25,940 Ton/day.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, in order to tackle the menace of plastic waste had notified, the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 (as amended) in March 2016. The Rules make source segregation of various types of waste mandatory. The ambition is to follow a waste-to-wealth pathway via recovery, reuse and recycling. The Rules also introduce Extended Producer Responsibility, as an environment policy instrument, and assign physical, financial and environmental responsibilities to producers, brand owners and importers of plastic. Under the rubric of the Extended Producer Responsibility, producers/ brand owners need to work with all stakeholders including local bodies, informal sector etc.

India was the global host of 2018 'World Environment Day' which took place on June 5, 2018. With "Beat Plastic Pollution" being the theme for that year's edition, the world came together to minimize plastic consumption and mitigate its impact on environment. During this event, Hon'ble Prime Minister had announced India's pledge to phase-out all Single-Use Plastic by 2022.

Apart from the regulations existing at the Central level, many State/UT Governments through their own notifications has imposed partial or full ban on use of plastic carry bags/single use plastic in their states.

24(of total 29) States and 6 (of total 7) UTs have issued notifications/ orders introducing regulations pertaining to complete ban on plastic carry bags and/or other single-use plastic items. In addition, some States/UTs have introduced partial bans on carry bags or specific single-use items supplementing Plastic Waste Management Rules (PWMR), 2016 in some ways.

Single-Use Plastic

Single-use plastics, also often referred to as disposable plastics (use-and-throw items), are commonly used for plastic packaging and include items intended to be used only once, before they are thrown away or recycled. These include, among other items, carry bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups and cutlery.

Over the years, the amount of plastic entering the oceans and seas have increased. Plastic Marine litter is harmful for the marine ecosystem, biodiversity and potentially human health. Widespread concern on the issue has necessitated the need for a strategic approach to management of plastic waste. The Single-use Plastic items represent majority of items found in plastic marine litter.

Under the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 plastic carry bags (virgin or recycled) with thickness less than 50 microns and plastic sheet or like, which is not an integral part of multi-layered packaging and cover made of plastic sheet used for packaging, wrapping commodities, with thickness less than 50 microns are banned.

State Governments have introduced regulations for management of plastic waste (or full/partial ban on plastic carry bags) by two ways:

- i. Introducing legislation on waste management: some States have introduced specific legislation on waste management. Through such legislation, they have introduced rules on plastic carry bags.

The States which have introduced legislation are:

- i. Himachal Pradesh: H.P. Non-Biodegradable Garbage (Control) Act, 1995;
 - ii. Madhya Pradesh: Madhya Pradesh Jaiv Anaashya Apashishta (Niyantaran) Adhiniyam, 2004;
 - iii. Maharashtra: Maharashtra Non-Biodegradable Garbage (Control) Act, 2006;
 - iv. Jammu & Kashmir: Jammu and Kashmir State Non-Biodegradable Material (Management Handling and Disposal) Act, 2007
 - v. Punjab: Punjab Plastic Carry Bags (Manufacture, Usage and Disposal) Control Act, 2005
- ii. States have power under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 under Section 5 to issue directions: Some of the States which have issued directions under the same are: Haryana, Uttaranchal, Delhi, Rajasthan, U.P., Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura.

Action Items

The following sections map different set of actions taken by the State/ Urban Governments, public sector entities aimed at minimizing production and usage of single-use plastics.

Waste management system improvements

Prohibition on plastic carry bags and single-use plastics can effectively counter some of the challenges. However, better waste management systems, can achieve long-term impacts and address the overall problem of plastics in the environment.

- i. States/UTs may invest heavily in improving source segregation of waste. Waste collection and transportation systems should be standardized, and best practices should be inculcated.
- ii. Manual on Municipal Solid Waste Management — 2016, as prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoH&UA), which provides a management framework for “Integrated Solid Waste Management” as an approach and provide a framework for ULBs to prepare a Municipal Solid Waste Management Plan in 7 simple steps, is the primary implementation source in this regard.
- ii. States/UTs and ULBs may focus on improving last mile delivery of collection and transportation services. The focus should also be placed on improving collection and transportation infrastructure and ensuring segregated waste is collected.
- iii. The States/ UTs shall endeavour to promote and encourage identification and use of plastic alternatives products.

Legal options for phasing out of Single-Use Plastic

State/ UT administrations intending to introduce a prohibitive action on single-use plastic products may identify a clear list of products that need to be targeted through this measure so that there is no ambiguity. The products may include:

- (a) All plastic carry bags, with or without handles, irrespective of thickness and size;
- (b) Plastic cutlery including plates, plastic cups/glass, straws, stirrers etc.; and
- (c) Cutlery and other decorative made of Styrofoam (Thermocol).

Promotion of eco-friendly alternatives

State/UT Governments can play a key role in promoting eco-friendly alternatives in order to phase out single-use plastics progressively. Projects which support upscaling or recycling of single-use plastic items and promote small scale or micro enterprises, should be encouraged. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, through a central sector scheme titled ‘Creation of Management Structure for Hazardous Substances’ provides financial assistance for innovative technologies and novel treatment options for different waste streams.

Social Awareness and public education

- i. Awareness/ Sensitization campaigns should be organized throughout the State/UT through TV/ Radio etc. to discourage the use of single-use plastic.
- ii. All events organized by or sponsored by the Govt. shall be single-use plastic free.
- iii. Governments should try to invite eminent public personalities to serve as brand ambassadors or in any other capacity in the campaign to discourage the use of single-use plastic.
- iv. Attention should be focussed on creating awareness/ sensitization in hotspots of plastic usage including tourist spots, religious spots, beaches, pilgrimage sites, schools colleges etc.
- v. Particular attention should also be focussed on students and young adults to inculcate a behavioural change in plastic usage. Changes in school curriculum should be introduced to discourage use of single-use plastics, promote the use of plastic alternate materials and promote source segregation.

Action by Government offices

State/UT Governments and Government employees should serve as an ideal in the effort to combat single-use plastic. In this regard, following actions should be undertaken:

- i. All Govt. offices/ sub-ordinate offices etc., all other offices under the administrative control shall be declared single-use plastic free by banning single-use plastic items/ disposable plastic items including:
 - i. All types of Plastic carry bags; and
 - ii. Plastic/ thermocol (polystyrene) disposable cutlery including cups/glass, bowls, glasses, forks, spoons, containers, straws etc. used for serving eatables/drinks.
- ii. Further, all Govt. offices/ sub-ordinate offices etc. and all other offices under the administrative control shall be discouraged to use plastic products including:
 - i. Artificial flowers, banners, flags, flower pots;
 - ii. PET plastic water bottles;
 - iii. Plastic folders, trays etc. and
 - iv. Any other plastic material for which an alternative exists.
- iii. All Government offices/ sub-ordinate offices etc. shall promote and practice source segregation. Public sector enterprises should be encouraged to promote such phase-out of single-use plastics
- iv. Private sector should also be encouraged to give up single-use plastic voluntarily.

Extended Producer Responsibility

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, is currently formulating a national framework for implementing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) under Rule 9 of Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016. Under the proposed framework, modalities will be fixed for producers/ brand owners and importers of plastic products for implementing the EPR framework, working in consonance with State Urban Development Departments/ Urban Local Bodies/ Central Pollution Control Board/ State Pollution Control Boards/ Committees and other stakeholders involved in the plastic value chain.

Certain single-use plastic products including PET/PETE bottles used for packaging beverages including water, may not require prohibitive action and will come under the ambit of recycling/processing channels under EPR.

With reference to Multi-layered Packaging, it is observed that replacement technologies are still not available to the manufacturers of products which use such packaging. Hence it may not be suitable to phase-out or prohibit the use of MLPs at this stage. MLP which is non-recyclable or non-energy recoverable and with no alternate use are required to be phased out (Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018).