

What is the problem with the use of plastic?

'Plastic' is a general term for a wide range of synthetic materials that have certain qualities. Today, thousands of products are made of plastic or have plastic in them.

Plastic has many advantages:

- Light in weight.
- Malleable and can be moulded into solid objects of diverse shapes.
- Makes transport vehicles lighter and hence more fuel efficient.
- Preserves and protects food and machine.
- More versatile and less expensive than many alternative materials.
- The plastics industry provides employment for millions.

Disadvantages of using plastic:

- Needs a non-renewable resource like oil for production.
- Normally not biodegradable and hence stays in landfills for many years. Only a few types of plastic can be recycled.
- Widespread use of the thin plastic bag causes many problems:
 - Animals, birds, and marine organisms eat it mistaking it for food. Their stomach gets clogged with plastic and they die.
 - The thin bags fly in the air, clog storm water drains, and cause flooding in monsoon.
- Plastic items litter public places, gardens, wildlife reserves, and forests.
- Chemical additives used in plastic goods are hazardous to human health.
- A good part of the plastic that we throw away ends up in the ocean with terrible consequences for sea birds and marine organisms.
- Disposing of plastic by burning creates toxic dioxins.

Some cities and state governments in India have banned the use of thin plastic bags.

The Union Government introduced the Plastic Waste (Management and Handling) Rules in 2011. These rules have been amended in 2016 and renamed as the Plastic Waste Management Rules.

Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016

The salient features of the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016

- The minimum thickness of plastic carry bags has been increased from 40 microns to 50 microns.
- Rural areas have been brought in ambit of these rules since plastic has reached to rural areas also. Responsibility for implementation of the rules is given to Gram Panchayat.
- Responsibility of waste generators is being introduced. Individual and bulk generators like offices, commercial establishments, and industries are to segregate the plastic waste at source, handover segregated waste, and pay user fee as per bye-laws of the local bodies.
- Persons organizing public events (marriage functions, religious gatherings, public meetings etc.) held in open spaces have been made responsible for management of waste generated from these events.
- Use of plastic sheet for packaging has been brought under the ambit of these rules. Provisions have been introduced to ensure their collection and channelization to authorized recycling facilities.
- Extended producer responsibility; Producers (i.e persons engaged in manufacture or import of carry bags, multi-layered packaging and sheets or like and the persons using these for packing or wrapping their products) and brand owners have been made responsible for collecting waste generated from their products.
- Producers must keep a record of their vendors to whom they have supplied raw materials for manufacturing carry bags plastic sheets, and multi-layered packaging.
- Retailers and street vendors have been assigned the responsibility of not providing the commodities in plastic bags/plastic sheets/multi-layered packaging which do not

conform to these rules. Otherwise, they will have to pay fine.

- Plastic carry bags will be available only with shopkeepers/street vendors pre-registered with local bodies on payment of certain registration fee. The amount collected as registration fee by local bodies is to be used for waste management.
- CPCB has been mandated to formulate the guidelines for thermoset plastic (plastic difficult to recycle)
- Manufacturing and use of non-recyclable multi-layered plastic to be phased in two years.

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