

Draft Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2021

The draft Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2021, issued by the MoEFCC has necessitated a few changes in the country's handling of its plastic waste. The Environment Ministry had first notified the Plastic Waste Management Rules in March 2016. It had provisions for effective and improved collection, segregation, processing, treatment and disposal of plastic waste.

What are the 2021 rules?

- Phasing out Single-use Plastics: Single-use plastics have been defined under the rules as “a plastic commodity intended to be used once for the same purpose before being disposed of or recycled”.
- The rules have proposed to ban the manufacture, use, sale, import and handling of some single-use plastic items on a ‘pan India basis.
- The provisions will also apply to ‘multi-layered packaging’ – involved extensively in e-commerce and deliver services- but will exempt packaging used for imported goods.
- They shall apply to every waste generator, local body, Gram Panchayat, manufacturer, Importers and producer as well as ‘brand-owner and “plastic waste processor (recycler, co-processor, etc.)
- Thermoset plastic and thermoplastic will also fall within the ambit of these rules.
- These provisions will, however, not apply to commodities (including carrying bags) made of compostable plastic material, according to the rules.

The draft is proposed to be implemented in three stages starting this year and culminating in mid-2022.

- Stage I: The first set of rules propose that each sheet of non-woven plastic carry bag shall not be less than 60 (GSM per square metre) or 240 microns in thickness. A carry bag made of virgin or recycled plastic shall not be less than 120 microns, with effect from the same date.
- Stage II: The second stage will come into effect when six categories of single-use plastic — ear buds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, polystyrene (thermocool) for decoration — will be banned for sale, use, manufacture, stocking, import and distribution.
- Stage III: In the third stage, the list of banned items will grow to include single-use plastic plates, cups, glasses, cutlery such as forks, spoons, knives, straw, trays, wrapping/packing films around sweet boxes; invitation cards; cigarette packets, plastic/PVC banners less than 100 micron and stirrers.

Local bodies and state pollution control boards will ensure the implementation and enforcement of these rules.

What else is covered?

One, the amendment has extended the applicability of the rules to brand-owner, plastic waste processor, including the recycler, co-processor, etc. It will also include new definitions of:

- Non-woven plastic bag
- Plastic waste processing
- Single-use plastic (SUP) item
- Thermoset plastic
- Thermoplastic

Necessity of such a move:

- As much as 3.3 million metric tonnes of plastic waste was generated in India in 2018-19, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) report 2018-19.
- The total municipal solid waste generation is 55-65 million tonnes; plastic waste is approximately 5-6 per cent of the total solid waste generated in the country.
- Goa has the highest per capita plastic waste generation at 60 grams per capita per day, which is nearly double what Delhi generates (37 grams per capita per day).
- Clearly, we do not know the amount of plastic we generate as a country, as the increase in wealth and affluence contributes to a higher generation of plastic waste.
- Despite the Plastic Waste Management legislation of 2011, followed by numerous changes in the recent past, most parts of the country lack systematic efforts required to mitigate the risks associated with plastic waste.

Way Forward:

- Managing plastic waste requires effective knowledge, not only among those who produce plastic but also among those who handle it.
- Brand owners, consumers, recyclers and regulatory authorities need to take long strides in ensuring that we first inventorize the total amount of plastic waste that we generate by means of proper calculations.
- The second step would be to identify the avenues where the use of plastic can be minimised.
- Third, the brand owner and manufacturer should try and understand the fates a plastic packaging material would meet after its purpose of packaging has been served.
- Last, as consumers, we should ensure that all plastic waste leaving our homes is segregated and is not contaminated with food waste.

Conclusion

- Plastic, without a doubt, is a miracle commodity that has uses ranging from increasing shelf lives of eatables to medical equipment and automotive.
- Their waste management needs due attention. And the draft policies is a significant step in this direction.

Reference:

1. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/waste/draft-plastic-waste-management-rules-2021-addressing-the-bigger-problem-75939>
2. <https://thelogicalindian.com/environment/centre-proposes-three-stage-ban-on-single-use-plastic-items-plans-complete-prohibition-by-2022-end-27369>