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Mitigate Risks in Waste Disposal: NGT

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Why in News

Recently, the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has directed all States and Union Territories to take adequate steps to mitigate risks in disposal of bio-medical waste in view of the **Covid-19** pandemic.

Key Points

- **Unauthorised Healthcare Facilities:** The NGT raised concerns regarding unscientific disposal of bio-medical waste by unauthorised healthcare facilities. **Only 1.1 lakh** out of **2.7 lakh healthcare facilities** are **authorised** under the **Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016** so far.

The NGT asked the State Pollution Control Boards and pollution control committees to make efforts to bridge this gap to mitigate the risk in terms of unscientific disposal of bio-medical waste.

- Earlier, the **Karnataka High Court** has also directed the **Karnataka Government** to take special measures to **protect sanitation workers** while they collect waste from houses where persons subjected to **home quarantine** reside.
- The court directed that:
 - Waste from households under quarantine should be put in **yellow non-chlorinated plastic bags**, and be **treated as biomedical waste**.
 - Waste should be picked up from quarantine homes in a separate vehicle.
 - Sanitation workers and vehicle drivers should be provided with the necessary safety gear, such as gloves, goggles and gowns.
- Once collected, these waste must be disposed of, as per the **Biomedical Waste Management Rules, 2016**.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change notified the Bio-Medical Waste Management Rules in 2016.

The new set of Rules **replaced the Bio-Medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998**.

Highlights of Bio-Medical Waste Management Rules, 2016

- **Definition:** Biomedical waste was defined as **human and animal anatomical waste, treatment apparatus** like needles, syringes and other materials **used in health care facilities** in the process of treatment and research.

This waste is generated during diagnosis, treatment or immunisation in hospitals, nursing homes, pathological laboratories, blood bank, etc.
- **Objective:** The objective of the rules is to **properly manage the per day bio-medical waste** from healthcare facilities (HCFs) across the country.
- **Ambit:** The ambit of the rules has been expanded to include vaccination camps, blood donation camps, surgical camps or any other healthcare activity.
- **Phase out:** Use of chlorinated plastic bags, gloves and blood bags to be phased out within two years from March 2016.
- **Pre-treatment:** Pre-treatment of the laboratory waste, microbiological waste, blood samples and blood bags through disinfection or sterilisation on-site in the manner prescribed by the **World Health Organization (WHO)** or by the **National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO)**.
- **Training:** All health care workers to be provided training and immunization regularly.
- **Bar-code:** A Bar-Code System for bags or containers containing bio-medical waste for disposal will be established.
- **Categorisation:** Bio-medical waste has been classified into 4 categories instead of the earlier 10 categories to improve the segregation of waste at source.
- **Stringent standards for pollutants:** The rules prescribe more stringent standards for incinerators to reduce the emission of pollutants in the environment.
- **Land:** The State Government provides the land for setting up common bio-medical waste treatment and disposal facilities.
- No establishment of on-site treatment and disposal facility, if a service of `common bio-medical waste treatment facility is available at a distance of seventy-five kilometer.
- Operators of a common bio-medical waste treatment and disposal facility have to ensure the timely collection of bio-medical waste from the HCFs and assist the HCFs in conduct of training.

National Green Tribunal

- NGT was established in the year **2010** under the **National Green Tribunal Act 2010**.

- It was **established for**
 - Effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
 - Enforcement of any legal right relating to the environment.
 - Giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.
- The Tribunal is guided by **principles of natural justice**.

Source: TH