



Mains Marathon

Day 37: Recently Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2022 were laid to deal with the plastic waste menace, discuss other recent measures taken in handling plastic waste management. (250 words)

16 Aug 2022 | GS Paper 3 | Bio-diversity & Environment

Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Briefly explain plastic waste and problems with plastics.
- Write the main provisions of Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2022.
- Mention other measures taken by Government of India to tackle Plastic waste.
- Problem faced in handling plastic pollution.
- Conclude by suggesting some measures.

Answer:

Plastic waste, because of its **non-biodegradable nature**, persists in the environment, for hundreds (or even thousands) of years. Plastic pollution is caused by the accumulation of plastic waste in the environment. It can be categorized as **primary plastics, such as cigarette butts and bottle caps, or secondary plastics, resulting from the degradation of the primary ones**. Plastic has become one of the most pressing environmental issues that we are facing today. **India is generating about 3.5 million tonnes of plastic waste annually** and the per capita plastic waste generation has almost doubled over the last five years.

Major Challenges to Plastic Waste Management

- **Mismanaged Plastic Waste (plastic dumped openly):** In the form of microplastics/microbeads when plastic enters the environment via inland waterways, wastewater outflows, and transport by wind or tides cannot all be filtered out once it enters the ocean. As plastics travel with ocean currents, an island of trash called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch has been created.
- **Spurious Biodegradable Plastic:** In the absence of robust testing and certification to verify claims made by producers, spurious biodegradable and compostable plastics are entering the marketplace.
- **Online or E-Commerce Companies:** Apart from the plastic we consume through traditional retail, the popularity of online retail and food delivery apps, though restricted to big cities, is contributing to the rise in plastic waste.
- **Terrestrial Plastic:** 80% of plastic pollution originates from land-based sources with the remainder from ocean-based sources (fishing nets, fishing ropes).

Provisions of Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2022

- The **number of categories of plastics** has been **reduced from 7 (PWM 2016) to 4**.
- **Plastic packaging:** The latest guidelines have mandated **the reuse of rigid plastic packaging material in order to reduce the use of fresh plastic material for packaging**.
- **EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) certificates:** In a significant first, the 2022 guidelines **allow for sale and purchase of surplus extended producer responsibility certificates**. This will establish a market mechanism for plastic waste management.
- **Centralized online portal:** The federal government has also proposed the formation of a **centralized online portal by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) for the registration** as well as filing of annual returns by producers, importers and brand-owners, **plastic waste processors of plastic packaging waste by March 31, 2022**.
- **Environmental compensation:** Environmental compensation will be levied based upon **the polluter pays principle**, with respect to non-fulfilment of EPR targets by producers, importers, and brand owners.
- Parties responsible for breaching the above guidelines shall be penalized **under the Environment Protection Act, 1986**, which stipulates a jail term of up to five years, or a fine of up to INR 100,000, or both. Furthermore, there are municipal laws on plastic waste, which also outline their own penalties.

Measures taken by Government of India in handling Plastic waste management

- **The Plastic Waste Management Rules (PWMR), 2016:** It provides the statutory framework for plastic waste management in an environmentally sound manner throughout the country.
- **Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021:** The Ministry has notified the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021, on 12th August 2021, prohibiting identified single use plastic items, which have low utility and high littering potential, from 1st July 2022.
- **National Dashboard on Elimination of Single Use Plastic and Plastic Waste Management:** India launched a nationwide awareness campaign on Single Use Plastics on World Environment Day in June 2022. **A mobile app for Single Use Plastics Grievance Redressal** was also launched to empower citizens to check sale/usage/manufacturing of SUP in their area and tackle the plastic menace.
- **India Plastics Pact:** It is the first of its kind in Asia. The Plastics Pact is an ambitious and collaborative initiative to bring stakeholders together to reduce, reuse and recycle plastics within the material's value chain.
- **Mascot 'Prakriti' and Green Initiatives for Effective Plastic Waste Management:** To spread awareness among masses about small changes that can be sustainably adopted in lifestyle for a better environment. **Industrial production of Graphene from Waste Plastic by National Institute of Health and Environment & National Research Development Corporation** to promote more industries to come forward to upcycle plastic waste.
- **Project REPLAN:** Project REPLAN (stands for Reducing Plastic in Nature) launched by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) aims to **reduce consumption of plastic bags by providing a more sustainable alternative**.

Raising awareness amongst the public of the harm caused by plastic pollution through education and outreach programs to modify behaviour. Finding substitutes for use-and-throw plastic and ensuring alternative livelihoods for producers, waste pickers and other groups involved in the business will go a long way in solving the problem. The government should not **only place fines for not adhering to the guidelines but incentivise producers to switch to more sustainable products**. Along with proper monitoring, promoting responsible consumerism is very important. Citizens also have to bring **behavioural change and contribute by not littering and helping in waste segregation and waste management**.

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