

# On World Environment Day, Delhi is yet to learn from other cities on tackling waste

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A man scavenges through a drain full of discarded plastic at Geeta colony in Delhi. As Delhi observes yet another World Environment Day, it is yet to get its act together when it comes to handling solid waste. (Ravi Choudhary/HT File Photo)

For a burgeoning metropolis — one that aims to compete with the best in the world — Delhi is yet get its act together when it comes to handling solid waste.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) report of 2017, Delhi produces over 10,000 metric tonnes of waste every day and has the highest share of plastic waste, among all Indian metropolitan cities, at 10.14%.

The landfills are overflowing with waste and the city is choking on plastic wrappers and household discards.

Hindustan Times brings to you examples from cities abroad and back home, which have successfully managed to segregate garbage and dispose of it.

## **Alappuzha leads**

About 2,000 kilometres from Delhi, Alappuzha in Kerala has found a place among five cities in the world that were recognised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for their efficiency in dealing with solid waste. All Alappuzha did to earn the honour was enforce the rules.

According to the UNEP, Alappuzha introduced a decentralised waste management system.

A few years ago, roadsides and canals were filled with stinking garbage, threatening the coastal district's distinction of 'most-favoured' tourist destination as well as exposing residents to clouds of flies and disease-spreading mosquitoes, the report said.

In an email reply to Hindustan Times, the Alappuzha sanitation department said it encourages residents to reuse at least 80% of the waste generated by them. That means agencies have to deal with only 20%.

"Any productive change can only be implemented if residents participate in it," the response read. Better known by its sobriquet "the Venice of the East", Alappuzha separates biodegradable waste at the ward level, then treats it in small composting plants and provides many of its 1,74,000 residents with biogas for cooking, the agency said.

## **Japan shows the way in handling landfills**

In the last decade, Japan's capital Tokyo has become a shining example of waste management for the rest of the world to emulate. It has worked extensively in waste segregation, collection and fixing responsibility on manufacturers of plastic in the form of bottles and wrappers.

The Japanese government's website shows that there are 19 waste incineration plants in the central part of Tokyo alone.

Although many experts say that incineration plants are not the best way to tackle waste, with Japan opting for the latest technology, disposal methods are efficient and environmental friendly. Municipal agencies have also found a solution for saturated landfills and are converting them into public spaces. In the early nineties, municipal agencies started scooping up trash heaps to level the land and layering the area with rocks, cement and soil. These areas were developed into recreational spots and green spaces and, in a decade, they were able to regain the natural ecosystem. Currently, as per the Tokyo municipal website, 13 species of animals and birds nest in these spaces.

The city has also worked on the basics —segregation of household waste is mandatory. The practice of waste segregation is taken so seriously that even 'plastic waste' is further segregated as batteries, PET bottles and grocery packets. They are collected by agencies depending on the frequency of generation. For example, household waste is collected daily, while battery waste is collected once a year.

## Mandatory recycling in Maharashtra

In the economic capital of the country, in September 2017, state environment minister Ramdas Kadam announced that the state will ban the use, sale, possession and manufacturing of plastic bags and thermocol. The ban was subsequently imposed on March 23, 2018. However, the government soon faced opposition from the manufacturers' associations which termed the ban illegal. The Maharashtra Plastic Manufacturers' Association filed a writ petition in the Bombay high court on March 30, seeking to set aside the ban.

Based on the HC directives, in the first week of April, the state lifted the ban on PET and PETE bottles with a capacity of less than half a litre, but issued orders for mandatory recycling of such bottles by installing vending and crushing machines.

“There is substantial awareness among people, and most municipal corporations and district administrations have voluntarily taken up the job of enforcing the ban. While we do not have specific data from all districts, we are aware that action is underway across Maharashtra. Even after the HC order, we got reports of plastic bottles being confiscated. We are hopeful that the ban will help improve the environment and reduce the burden on the ocean,” Satish Gavai, additional chief secretary, Maharashtra state environment department, said.

At present, the state government has imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 on those in violation of the ban. A second offence will invite a fine of Rs 10,000 and a subsequent offence will be fined Rs 25,000 and/or imprisonment of up to three months.



Workers sort bottles at recycling workshop in Mumbai. (Reuters File Photo)