

CPCB revises idol immersion guidelines; bans plastic, plaster of Paris, thermocol to make idols

New Delhi, May 13 (PTI) In a bid to ensure idol immersion in an eco-friendly manner in the country, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has banned the use of plastic, thermocol and plaster of Paris in making idols of gods and goddesses.

The CPCB has revised its 2010 guidelines on idol immersion after taking views of stakeholders, especially emphasising use of naturally occurring clay, colours in place of synthetic paints and chemicals for colouring idols.

It said that the use of single-use plastic and thermocol shall not be permitted at all and only eco-friendly material such as straw structure shall be used in making idols or decoration of idols/pandals/tazias in order to prevent pollution in recipient water bodies.

"Idols made up of only natural, bio-degradable, eco-friendly raw material without any toxic, inorganic raw material [such as traditional virtuous clay and mud as well as free from plaster of Paris, plastic and thermocol (polystyrene) should be encouraged, allowed and promoted, and idols made up of plaster of Paris (PoP) shall be banned.

"Only dried flower components for making ornaments of idols and natural resins of trees may be used as a shining material for making idols attractive," the apex pollution control body said in its revised guidelines issued on Tuesday.

Every year, the water bodies in the country get highly polluted after idol immersion during festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi and Durga Pooja as the idols are made up of inorganic and toxic material instead of traditional eco-friendly mud and clay.

The guidelines formulated by the CPCB in the past have gone largely unheeded as the water quality continued to go down after these festivals.

The revised guidelines have now prohibited the use of toxic and non-biodegradable chemical dyes/oil paints for painting idols as well.

"Only naturally occurring colours from plants (flowers, barks, stamens, leaves, roots, seeds, whole fruits), feathers of different birds, mineral or coloured rocks shall be used," it said.

The CPCB has also directed the concerned State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs)/Pollution Control Committees (PCCs) in states and union territories to conduct water quality assessment of water bodies, preferably in tier-1 cities (having population of more than 1 lakh), at three stages i.e. pre-immersion, during immersion and post-immersion.

"Post-festival, samples should be collected preferably after third, fifth and seventh and ninth day of the festival," the pollution watchdog said.

"SPCBs/PCCs shall help district administration in preparing material for creating mass awareness as well as to assess innovative approaches for eco-friendly idol making by idol makers or craftsman or artisans," the CPCB said.

It also said the concerned authorities in state governments and UT administration dealing with safety and security in coastal areas shall take care of the necessary arrangements like motor boats with security personnel/home guards with adequate safety equipment to supervise idol immersion activities during festive season.

"As far as possible idol immersion in rivers/ponds/lakes shall be encouraged only at specific designated artificial confined tanks/ponds with liner made with well graded/highly impervious clay or eco-synthetic liner, on the banks shall be promoted.

"A temporary artificial tank or pond with liner made with well graded/highly impervious clay or eco-synthetic liner (HDPE), and having earthen bunds on the bank of the river/lake/pond shall be created for idol immersion," it said.

It also suggested that the charges of hiring agencies to clean-up the waste from the designated idol immersion sites should be collected as "visarjan charges" from every individual citizen or community.

"The "visarjan charges" collected should be utilised to clean-up immersion sites, to manage polluted water from artificial temporary tank/ponds and for environmentally sound management of solid remains of idol.

"The waste water collected from the designated temporary artificial ponds/tanks after ensuring on-site pre-treatment shall be discharged into or public sewers leading to sewage treatment plants/common effluent treatment plants," it said. PTI AG KJ

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