

Compost from waste is low grade, say activists

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Pune: The compost churned out at the two mini wet waste treatment plants of the Pune Municipal Corporation is sub-standard and can harm the soil and crop on which it is used, alleged the Nagrik Chetna Manch, a group of civic activists, which claims to have got the compost samples tested at a city-based lab.

The Manch said the treatment plants are operating without mandatory technological clearance needed from the Central Pollution Control Board. The activists are now seeking closure of these plants pending an independent assessment of their technical viability and procedural diversions by the civic authorities.

The Manch first evaluated samples from the plant located near Shanipar on Bajirao Road. The compost was found low on nitrogen and phosphorous contents. Its acidic content (pH ratio) too was lower than the prescribed norms while the carbon:nitrogen ratio was abnormally high.

Activists alleged that the claims made by plant operators of '24-hours microorganism based composting machines' for the sake of securing tenders are incorrect as the natural process of composting takes a minimum of 10 days. Further, the built-up infrastructure of the plant was found to be substandard with the potential to harm environment and citizens through risk of groundwater contamination, the activists said.

In an email written to chief minister Devendra Fadnis, guardian minister Girish Bapat and senior officials of the Maharashtra Pollution Control

MACHINES AT WORK

Pic: Sadanand Godse

- Mini plants approved by PMC | **Seven**
- Mini plants authorised by MPCB | **Two**
- Plants cleared by CPCB | **0**
- Daily processing capacity | **Two to five tonne**
- Average monthly electricity bill of operating one plant | **₹1 lakh**



WHAT THE LAB SPOTTED

- The compost does not have sufficient nitrogen, thus retarding microbial growth
- High acidic content is harmful for soil

OBJECTIONS TO SHANIPAR PLANT

- Operating without MPCB authorisation
- No 'consent' against section 25 of the Water (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and section 21 of the Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1981
- No clearance from the CPCB under schedule II(5)(i) and Schedule IV(1) of the MSW (M&H) Rules, 2000

Board, the Nagrik Chetna Manch stated: "This is a classic example of malpractices behind the backs of the regulatory authorities and citizens. Such plants are now being installed in housing societies and condominiums as well. We recommend strict action against those responsible for this waste of public money and for causing threat to the health of citizens because, in the absence of requisite clearances and safety measures, the extent of pollution (ambient air, ground water and foul smell) that these plants would cause is unknown."

Major General (retd) S C N Jatar, president of the Nagrik Chetna Manch, said, "We hope the central and state-level pollution control boards would step in and conduct their own checks. Such plants are being marketed to residential socie-

ties too and the extent of damage they have caused so far is unknown. The Pune Municipal Corporation needs to comply with the applicable rules and laws."

A senior MPCB official avoided giving a direct answer on what steps it was taking to ensure compliance. "A few plants are in operation. The Pune Municipal Corporation has applied to the Central Pollution Control Board for technical clearance. We have also initiated a survey of their operations. Closing them down is not a practical solution," the official said.

Suresh Jagtap, head of the solid waste management department, also assured action. "We have sent our compost samples to the government lab. We are awaiting its report and will take action accordingly," he said.

