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Industrial waste needs better management: experts

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BANGALORE : Despite increasing environment concerns, waste management strategies employed by industries leave a lot to be desired. Experts say India is today battling the issues the US faced in the '60s.

The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) organized a talk by US-based environment consultant and certified hazardous materials manager Christie M Sunderrajan on 'Hazardous material management at dump sites and by industries'. Participants included environment engineers from industries and the KSPCB. The talk focused on the importance of compliance with government regulations and the need for environment remediation.

KSPCB chief environmental officer M D N Simha cited the recent remediation process in Kortegere, near Tumkur, where almost 200 tonnes of hazardous waste was dumped by an industry. This led to contamination of wells in the area. The board recently shifted the waste at a cost of Rs 14 lakh.

"Remediation is extremely expensive and a technical process. But at the same time, it is important. We ask industries to do due diligence before setting up, so we know of environment issues at the site. Required measures can then be taken up accordingly," he said.

Christie spoke on compliance as an important aspect of sustainability. An environment consultant usually sees to it that a company has all regulatory permits for hazardous waste, transport, waste water and groundwater. Though she spoke about regulations in the US, similar provisions in India were also discussed.

The environment officer of an industry needs to take care of aspects of waste management like handling solid waste, hazardous waste, storage, inspections by government officials and treatment. Other key areas include emergency planning in case of disorders, she said.

After the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, a law on emergency planning and the right to know was enacted in the US. Christie highlighted the cradle-to-grave policy there, which means a producer is responsible throughout the life cycle of a product, including the waste it generates after death.

She said remedial investigation is another area industries tend to overlook. Every site has a history. Before setting up, an assessment on aspects like groundwater contamination is important, she added. In the US, a detailed process of gathering data to track leftovers from industries on that site, soil boring, assessment of surface and groundwater sampling is done. If the site is found to have contaminated soil, suitable measures are taken. A confirmatory sampling is done to check if the measures were successful.

"Due to the recession, many factories are closing down and areas are being taken over by other industries. Without an assessment, we cannot know what they leave behind," Simha said.

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