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Date: 23 March 2024

PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) RULES, 2024

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) RULES, 2024". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "ENVIRONMENT" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Environment Ministry has recently presented the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules 2024, aiming to modify the existing Plastic Waste Management Rules of 2016. Under these revised regulations, producers of disposable plastic items face stricter criteria when labelling their products as 'biodegradable'.

KEY AMENDMENTS IN PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) RULES, 2024

BROADENED PRODUCER DEFINITION

The amendments now encompass not just plastic packaging manufacturers but also those involved in producing the intermediate materials used for such packaging. Additionally, contract manufacturers and brand owners working with plastic packaging are now classified as "producers," ensuring greater accountability.

COMPOSTABLES AND BIODEGRADABLES GET RECOGNITION

The definition of "manufacturer" now explicitly includes entities producing compostable and biodegradable plastics. This acknowledges the potential of these alternatives but emphasises the need for robust certification to ensure genuine biodegradation and prevent microplastic formation.

EXPANDED IMPORTER SCOPE

The definition of "importer" is extended to capture various plastic materials like resins, pellets, and intermediate materials used in manufacturing plastic packaging, films, and preforms. This broader definition strengthens control over plastic entering the country.

LOCAL BODIES EMPOWERED AND ACCOUNTABLE

Local bodies like Panchayats now have a more active role. They are mandated to conduct annual assessments of plastic waste generation, including existing plastic waste in dumpsites, and estimate

future generations for the next five years. Additionally, they are tasked with preventing the use of banned single-use plastic items within their jurisdiction.

RESTRICTING PLASTIC RAW MATERIAL SALES

Manufacturers and importers of plastic raw materials can now only sell to registered producers and sellers under these rules. This prevents them from supplying materials for the production of prohibited single-use plastic items.

REGISTRATION AND REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

Manufacturers and importers of plastic raw materials must register with the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) and submit regular reports detailing their activities.

INTRODUCING SELLERS

The amendments introduce “sellers” as entities dealing in plastic raw materials like resins, pellets, or intermediate materials used for plastic packaging production. Sellers are required to submit annual reports on their transactions to the pollution control authorities.

NEW BIODEGRADABLE PLASTIC CATEGORY

A new category (V) for biodegradable plastics has been introduced. These products will have specific labelling requirements and separate markings designated by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).

THICKNESS EXEMPTION FOR BIODEGRADABLES

The minimum thickness requirement of 50 microns for carry bags does not apply to compostable or biodegradable carry bags. This incentivises the use of these alternatives.

TACKLING PRE-CONSUMER WASTE

Manufacturers are now obligated to process pre-consumer plastic waste generated during production, such as rejects and discards. They must also report these activities to the SPCB/CPCB, promoting responsible waste management practices.

MINIMUM RECYCLING TARGETS

Manufacturers and importers must achieve minimum recycling levels for plastic packaging waste as mandated by the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) targets. This promotes a circular economy for plastic waste.

NEED TO REFINE PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES

- Biodegradable and compostable plastics are India’s weapons against plastic pollution, but the current Plastic Waste Management Rules create confusion.
- **Unclear Standards:** Biodegradable plastics undergo treatment but lack a definitive test for complete degradation. Compostable plastics demonstrably decompose but require specific facilities.

- The 2022 single-use plastic ban promoted biodegradables, yet the definition remained unclear. This ambiguity caused delays, as the Central Pollution Control Board couldn't certify products due to the lack of a biodegradability standard.

ABOUT MICROPLASTIC

Microplastics, a term coined in the mid-2000s, refer to plastic particles smaller than 5 millimetres. These tiny invaders come from two main sources:

- **Intentionally Manufactured:** Microplastics can be deliberately produced for specific uses. A common example is microbeads, the tiny plastic spheres found in some personal care products like scrubs and exfoliants.
- **Unintentional Breakdowns:** Larger plastic items degrade and fragment over time, generating secondary microplastics. Synthetic fibres shed from clothing during washing and tyre wear from vehicles also contribute to microplastic pollution.

PRELIMS PRACTISE QUESTIONS

Q1. What impact can microplastics have on marine organisms?

- (a) Enhanced growth rates
- (b) Improved reproductive success
- (c) Ingestion and entanglement
- (d) Reduced toxicity

Answer: C

Q2. What role do microplastics play in the food chain?

- (a) They serve as a primary food source for many species
- (b) They have no impact on the food chain
- (c) They bioaccumulate in organisms, potentially reaching higher trophic levels
- (d) They break down into harmless substances, providing nutrients

Answer: C

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

Q1. Discuss the role of consumerism in contributing to the increase in microplastic pollution. How do consumer behaviours such as single-use plastics and fast fashion exacerbate this environmental issue?

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