

Plastic bags: No ban, only penalty

BMC wants state to penalise citizens using carrybags below 50 microns

Sharad Vyas | TNN

Mumbai: Contrary to what its political leadership has been widely propagating, the BMC has merely recommended to the state environment department a penalty on citizens found using plastic carrybags below 50 microns.

The BMC's proposal, which is being scrutinised by its legal cell before being forwarded to the Maharashtra government, suggests a fine of Rs 5 to Rs 10 on anyone found carrying material in bags that of less than 50 microns thickness. For this purpose, the civic body has asked the state to make necessary changes to the Maharashtra Non-Biodegradable Garbage (Control) Ordinance, 2006.

Instead of a complete ban on plastic bags, the municipal administration has asked the state to make existing rules more stringent to discourage manufacturing, use and circulation of banned plastic.

"The present laws have provision for penalising retailers, shopkeepers, stockist and street vendors, but they do not talk about penalising the end users or consumers. We propose that suitable changes be made in the existing laws to make consumers responsible for aiding and abetting circulation of banned plastic bags," the proposal reads.

Once that happens, the BMC is hoping instead of paying up the fine, most consumers would start buying paper or cloth bags. "And this may well turn out to be one of the remedies to the plastic menace," it adds.

Worldwide, a fine on the use of plastic carry bags is usually seen as an effective deterrent against the menace of plastic bags. On January 1, Washington DC announced a 5% levy on its residents on the use of each plastic bag. Another country to have adopted similar measures is Ireland, which in 2002 passed a tax on plastic bags, charging 33 cents per bag from the customers.

Mumbai's first citizen Shraddha Jadhav last week announced an "unplanned call" for a total ban on plastic bags, only to make a U-turn later. But the administration

recommendations are a move towards making the existing norms more tighter and stringent. The civic proposals also suggests a hike in penalty for manufacturers.

"As an amendment to section 9 of the ordinance, it is proposed that instead of imposing penalty of imprisonment as a third-time offence, it should be imposed on errant manufacturers caught for the first time." an official said. Currently, first-time offenders are fined Rs 5,000 and second-time offenders Rs 10,000. Third-time offenders are fined Rs 25,000 and can be sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

The BMC has also said that MPCB must enforce the laws more strictly. "The MPCB must revoke NoCs of those industries found to be producing banned plastic."

State pollution control board seals three units

Prafulla Marpakwar | TNN

Mumbai: Initiating a crackdown against illegal plastic bag manufacturers across the state, the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board sealed three units in the city. "The action was taken after it was confirmed that the unit owners were manufacturing plastic bags of less than 50-micron thickness. This is in blatant violation of the rules," a senior MPCB official told TOI on Tuesday.

While one unit is in Mulund, the other two units are in Bhandup, the official said. "Under the Environmental Protection Act, water and power supply to the units has been disconnected with immediate effect. We have ensured that all the three units stop production. In addition, we will initiate proceedings against the owners under the provisions of the EP act," he added.

According to the official, following a BMC proposal, a statewide drive has been launched to take on erring plastic bag manufacturers. "We have 450 plastic bag manufacturing units across the state. All of them manufacture plastic bags of 50 microns (thickness) and above. We will crack down on all those producing plastic bags of less than 50 microns," he said.

On Mayor Shradha Jadhav's proposal to ban all types of plastic bags, the official said it was well within the powers of the BMC to formulate such rules. "The general body of the BMC will simply have to pass a resolution to provide for a complete ban on use of plastic bags. There is no need to amend the BMC act. But this will require a strong political will, which seems lacking," he said.

The official pointed out that a week ago, Jadhav publicly declared her intention to ban all types of plastic bags. "But now it seems like she is having second thoughts. If the Mayor decides, she can certainly move the proposal before the general body and pass a resolution," he said.

A senior urban development official said, "The BMC can

study a decision taken by the Bhimashankar Panchayat Samiti in neighbouring Pune district. In Bhimashankar, there is a complete ban on the use of all types of plastic bags. Though it's a small panchayat samiti, the rule has been implemented in letter and spirit. If Bhimashankar can do it, why not the BMC," the official asked.

"It is the joint responsibility of both the MPCB and BMC to ensure that plastic bags below 50 micron thickness are neither sold nor manufactured in the metropolis," he said.

