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TIME FOR ACTION

Using thin plastic will cost you

State To Fine Those Using Bags Less Than 50 Microns Thick

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Mumbai: After failing to enforce a complete ban on plastic bags thinner than 50 microns, the environment department has now proposed to impose a nominal fine on those found using them. "Since it was unable to stop the use of banned plastic bags, the department has proposed to impose a fine on consumers," a senior official said on Friday.

The official said the issue of easy availability of banned plastic bags prominently figured at a high-level meeting convened by chief secretary D K Sankaran to discuss the flood situation in the metropolis following heavy rains in the first week of July.

When it was specifically pointed out that plastic bags were responsible for large-scale water logging, the department proposed that unless the consumers were taken to task, it would not be possible to halt use of plastic bags. The department proposed that it will soon submit a comprehensive proposal for fining users. "It was admitted in the meeting that despite a stringent law, we have not been able to ban use of plastic bags. The agencies responsible for enforcing the law miserably failed in their task," the official added.

After 26/7, when it was found that gutters choked with plastic bags led to flooding, chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh had on August 24 announced that his government would ban all plastic bags. But the environment department never took the cabinet decision seriously, as a result, there was a delay in the actual issuing of an official order.

A month after the CM's announcement, the environment department invited objections and suggestions on the proposal. When the objections were received, instead of taking a decision, the government appointed a committee headed by former chief secretary V Rangnathan to study the same and make recommendations.

The former chief secretary in his report recommended that all plastic bags below 100 microns should be banned. Subsequently, when the environment department made submissions to the cabinet, it suggested that instead of 100 microns, the thickness should be reduced to 50 microns and also recommended a fine of Rs 5,000 on the manufacturers and traders. As per the recommendations, a final notification was issued in March 2006, but it was never implemented in letter and spirit, so the ban remained only on paper.

It was also found that none of the enforcing agencies, including the BMC, submitted a compliance report either to the environment department or the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board.

