

# Dairies get 2 more months to decide on pouch disposal

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## Mumbai/Pune:

The state government has decided to give milk producers an extension of two months to set up a recycling mechanism for empty pouches. Milk producers in the state had threatened to stop collecting milk from farmers and packaging it in plastic pouches, citing their inability to prepare an extended producer responsibility (EPR) plan under the plastic ban in Maharashtra.

The EPR plan—modalities of a waste collection system—needs to be submitted to the government for approval. But dairies have expressed inability to implement an EPR. A meeting to resolve the issue was held in Mantralaya on Tuesday under environment minister Ramdas Kadam. The minister said they have asked the dairies to submit their proposal in two months, failing which a government model (see box) will be implemented.

“Dairies and milk producers had issues with our model, so we have asked them to submit a model of their own. My aim is to ensure that empty milk pouches are not found in the garbage. It doesn’t matter which model is followed to achieve this,” said Kadam. Opposition leader Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil and Ajit Pawar too were present for the meeting.

Prakash Kutwal, secretary, Milk Producers’ and Processors’ Welfare Association, said, “We are glad that the state government heard us and has given a two-month period. Though the government feels that close to 2 crore plastic milk pouches end up in the bins all over the state, we are firm that only 2% to 3% pouches of the 10,000 tonne used to pack milk annually end up in bins. This means that 97% of the used milk pouches in state are recycled to make various other plastic products. We will convince the government of this fact during the two months that we have so that the dairy industry is absolved of the EPR mechanism.”

A source from Maharashtra Plastic Manufacturers Association said two factories making plastic films (used to make milk pouches) had shut down due to the EPR issue. “We have been verbally informed that the two factories, in Pune and Ahmednagar, will soon get permission to open due to the two-month extension. Thanks to the extension, plastic film manufacturers, both in Maharashtra and Daman, will continue to supply milk films to dairies,” he said.

**THE PLASTIC WAR**

**GOVT'S SUGGESTION**

- The state govt has suggested a buy-back mechanism wherein consumers be charged a 50p deposit, which will be refunded to them when they return empty pouches
- Govt says all pouches end up in dustbin

**WHAT DAIRIES SAY**

- The buy-back mechanism is impractical as dairies do not have the financial wherewithal and manpower
- Only 2-3% of milk packets end up in dustbin and 97% is recycled

The infographic features a photograph of a person in a blue shirt holding a yellow bin filled with discarded milk pouches.