

Recently, The National Green Tribunal (NGT) instructed the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to establish guidelines regarding the disposal of cigarette and beedi butts within three months. Recognizing the detrimental effects of tobacco, NGT emphasized its concern over the disposal of these waste products.

Background of the Issue

The calls for regulation were championed by an NGO named 'Doctors for You', which sought to regulate the disposal of cigarette and beedi butts in addition to prohibiting tobacco consumption in public spaces. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare flagged that cigarette and beedi butts are non-biodegradable. However, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change highlighted that these items are not categorized as hazardous.

CPCB Report on Cigarette and Beedi Butts

According to a CPCB report, the analysis of cigarette and beedi butts indicates that their concentration levels will not cause harm to humans or the environment. These butts comprise primarily of cellulose acetate (95%), wrapping paper, and rayon, which persist for a long time without degradation. Nevertheless, data on the toxicity of cellulose acetate remains unavailable.

IITR Study Findings

A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Toxicology Research (IITR) endorsed the CPCB report, stating that the analyzed parameters' concentration is below prescribed limits and is not toxic. Additionally, it suggested that actual environmental conditions and laboratory-stimulated conditions should be considered when determining the safety or toxicity of cigarette butts and their correlation with human and environmental health risk assessment.

Suggestions to Address the Issue

One suggestion put forward is the establishment of a national-level committee to study the impact of discarded cigarette and beedi butts and public spitting of tobacco products. Recycling of cellulose acetate from cigarette butts offers one potential immediate solution. Experts urge more research to generate data on degradation and safety, informing the formation of guidelines.

Indian Government's Efforts to Control Tobacco Consumption

Several initiatives have been undertaken by the Indian government to curb tobacco consumption.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO-FCTC), the first international treaty under WHO, was ratified by India in 2004. Developed in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic, it reaffirms everyone's right to the highest health standard.

Another initiative is the mCessation Programme, launched in 2016 as part of the government's Digital India initiative. This program uses mobile technology to help people quit tobacco, using two-way messaging with program specialists for dynamic support.

The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Amendment Rules, 2020, were notified by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to amend the 2008 rules.

Launched in 2007-08, the National Tobacco Control Programme aims to effectively implement Tobacco Control Law, raise awareness about tobacco's harmful effects, and meet obligations under the WHO-FCTC.

Other Efforts to Discourage Tobacco Use

On every 31st May, the World No Tobacco Day is observed by the WHO and global partners to raise awareness of tobacco use and second-hand smoke exposure's harmful and deadly effects. Since 2007, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has made efforts to introduce stronger graphic health warnings on tobacco packets, with mixed success.