

Waste pickers protest against unsafe disposal of sanitary napkins

ANJALI JHANGIANI KP

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SANITARY napkin companies have engaged in aggressive campaign to spread awareness about the use of sanitary napkins in schools and colleges in rural areas and the urban cities but they have ignored the requests of waste-pickers to provide a disposable bag along with the product, or make suitable amends for appropriate disposable techniques.

"You roll it and chuck it, sparing little thought to what happens to the sanitary pads after they are disposed. Sanitary pads are not biodegradable but can we make their disposal less degrading?" This is the question that the campaign titled 'Chuck de, the 'right way!' by SWaCH NGO has raised. When waste-pickers sort the wet and dry garbage, they are exposed to the unhygienic used sanitary napkin. While recognising and separating these non-biodegradable napkins, waste workers are infected with eye problems, respiratory ailments, gastroin-



testinal ailments, skin infections and allergies. These workers often belong to the lower income groups and are often undernourished which makes them more prone to diseases.

Members of SWaCH NGO have come up with a disposable paper bag that cost Re1 to pack the used sanitary napkin before chucking it into the dustbin. These bags have a bright yellow sticker with the details of usage, which makes it recognisable by waste pickers to separate it. "There has never been a

uniform way of chucking sanitary napkins. Some wrap it in paper, some put it in plastic bags and some just throw it away. If everyone used an uniform way of disposing the bag, it would be easier for waste pickers to separate it without being exposed to the harmful effects," says Baby Mohite, a SWaCH member and waste picker.

After sending numerous written requests to companies that manufacture sanitary napkins and diapers and getting no response, the SWaCH members decided to collect used sanitary napkins and send it to the companies as a gift on Women's Day. "We have been writing to these companies to discuss sustainable ways by which their products can be disposed. Since they have shown no interest whatsoever, we have organised a campaign called 'Send it back'. We will be sending back used towels and diapers to make them realise what waste pickers go through while sorting such waste," says Malati Gadgil, CEO, SWaCH.

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