

Pune Municipal Corporation not providing gear: SWaCH

PUNE: There is more trouble for the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) on the garbage front. Irate members of the wastepickers' cooperative Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH), who are engaged in door-to-door garbage collection, stormed the PMC office on Friday, demanding safety gear and equipment that they were to be provided as per their memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the civic body.

Although the schedule of handing out equipment, such as handcarts, buckets, aprons, saris, raincoats, gloves and soaps, has been clearly outlined in the MoU, not one item has been provided as per that, the wastepickers said.

SWaCH member Suman More said, "There have been more violations of the MoU than compliances. For instance, the civic body has not provided sorting sheds, welfare benefits, slum subsidies and timely payments to SWaCH. However, the very minimum the PMC could have done is give us the basic equipment for waste collection."

SWaCH members said that not getting the equipment translates into higher costs for the wastepickers, as either the cooperative has to raise the money or wastepickers have to shell out money from their own pockets. Wastepickers have been spending a minimum Rs 50 per month to repair handcarts, which are more than five years old. They argued that if the handcarts were replaced every two years as mentioned in the MoU, the maintenance costs would have been lower.

A statement issued by the cooperative said that the same holds true for welfare benefits. As per the MoU, a provision of Rs 700 per year per wastepicker was made in the budget towards their health and educational benefits.

Meanwhile, there has been no movement on the renewal of the MoU. The cooperative has continued to operate on the ground, collecting waste from four lakh households, sustaining the staff entirely through worker contribution, the statement said.

SWACH has demanded immediate provision of the pending equipment and payment of dues (maintenance cost at Rs 600 per wastepicker per year, for five years) owing to the delay on part of the PMC. It has also asked for payment of welfare dues, slum subsidy towards wastepickers servicing slum households at Rs 5 per month per household, and renewal of the SWACH docket on revised terms in keeping with inflation.