

Times of India
Waste pickers demand equipment, safety gear

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Pune: Waste pickers from across the city gathered in front of the Pune Municipal Corporation's (PMC) headquarters on Friday and demanded waste-collection equipment and safety gear. They also sought safe working conditions as promised in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the civic body and Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH) — city-based cooperative of self-employed waste pickers.

SWaCH, with its 2300-odd members provides front-end waste management services in Pune under a five-year contract with Pune Municipal Corporation.



Mandar Deshpande

Members of the SWaCH NGO at PMC building demanding safety equipment and a free annual medical check-up

They wanted buckets, gloves, wheelbarrows, scarves, footwear, uniforms, soap and raincoats. The workers said they were

forced to carry hazardous waste on their backs and sift through it with bare hands as the equipment provided by the civic body are inadequate and worn out. Their demand for protected well-constructed sheds to sort and store recyclable material had also not been met, they added.

The workers were led by senior activist Baba Adhav. "Sanitation of the city depends on these waste pickers. If they don't have the necessary equipment, they cannot be expected to work efficiently," he said.

Manisha Desai, who manages the outreach activities of SWaCH, said many waste pickers were being de-

nied their livelihood by the introduction of free waste-collection vehicles in some wards. "Nearly 53 waste pickers are out of work because free waste collection vehicles are operated by corporators in some wards. This is a violation of the MoU," she said.

Suresh Jagtap, head of the Pune Municipal Corporation's solid waste management department, met the waste pickers and agreed to hold a ward-wise meeting on May 29. He said the tendering process for the equipment has been initiated. "We are working on the synchronization of the collection vehicles with the waste pickers," he said.