

Wastepickers protest open disposal of sanitary pads

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Pune: Wastepickers on Friday expressed concern over disposal of sanitary pads/diapers and said that it was the responsibility of the manufacturers and municipal corporation to ensure that the products were disposed off in a responsible manner.

As a mark of protest, wastepickers sent boxes of used sanitary pads to the corporate offices of manufacturing companies. "We will continue this form of protest if the companies ignore our demands. Our health and hygiene should be a priority too for these companies," said Baby Mohite, a member of Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH).

"I provide waste picking service to about 70-80 households as well as two ladies' hostels. It is nauseating to handle such waste," said Pramod Kamble, another member of SWaCH.

SWaCH is a wholly-owned cooperative of self-employed wastepickers/waste collectors and other urban poor. It is an autonomous enterprise that provides front-end waste management services to the citizens of Pune.

Anita Dake, a wastepicker from Pimpri-Chinchwad area said, "It is the responsibility of the municipal corporation as well as the manufacturing companies to ensure that these products are disposed of responsibly."

Sharing the view, Rekha Sakpal, a wastepicker working in Pimpri-Chinchwad said, "These companies spend so much money on research to make the napkins comfortable for women to use. Why can't



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they spend some money to ensure that the same are wrapped and disposed of properly?"

"If each pad is wrapped in an identifiable pouch, we won't even have to open it. SWaCH members, who are old and unable to work any more, make such pouches (ST Dispo bags) and sell them at a nominal price of Re 1. Companies should attach these pouches to their sanitary pads, that way our old members too will be supported financially and we won't have to handle the soiled pads," said Mangal Kamble, a SWaCH member from Hadapsar.

SWaCH sells about 20,000 to 25,000 ST Dispo bags every month. However, each month 4-5 lakh sanitary pads are being disposed as per SWaCH. The gap between the two is wide.

Citizen and entrepreneur Mruga Kirloskar, a regular user of SWaCH ST Dispo bags, said "I wholly support the initiative. I promote the use of these bags among my friends.

As a responsible citizen, I feel it is my duty to be accountable for the manner in which I dispose my waste."

This campaign has been endorsed by organisations across the country. The Centre for Environment and Education has written to companies suggesting a partnership to implement a pilot programme where sanitary pads and diapers would be sold along with an identifiable disposal bag.

Office bearers of Parisar, an environmental organisation state, "Wastepickers in the course of sorting through the garbage for recyclable products inadvertently handle these soiled napkins with their bare hands. This is entirely unacceptable. A simple solution that has been shown to work is to include a disposable bag with the sanitary napkin. This will allow for easy identification and handling."

Janwani, a social initiative of the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture, too has written to the manufacturing companies questioning them about the efforts that they have taken or are planning to take in relation to the issue of disposal of sanitary pads.

Stree Mukti Sanghatana, a women's organisation and a member of the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers, while suggesting the elimination of plastic from sanitary pads to make them compostable and recyclable, stated, "Sanitary pads and diapers should be sold along with disposable bags that are made by women from the slums. That way, the products are truly by women, for women and to protect the health of women."