

Government provides fresh impetus for Swachh Bharat Mission

The Swachh Bharat Mission, which has been noticeably picking up speed of implementation over the last few months, is set to get a fresh impetus through some commendable decisions by the Government of India.

Currently, 1.7 lakh MTD of municipal solid waste is generated across the country. Of this amount, 82% is being collected, while a mere 24% of this is being processed. Swachh Bharat Mission plans to scale up the collection, transportation and processing of solid waste, to 100%. In an effort to make the processing of municipal solid waste (MSW) a value-adding proposition, through conversion to compost (Waste-to-compost in partnership with Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers) and power (Waste-to-power in partnership with Ministry of Power), the Ministry of Urban Development has been taking various steps to improve the marketability of these end products (compost and power).

While the annual composting potential from the MSW generated is 54 lakh MT, the current installed capacity across 56 waste-to-compost plants is 10 lakh MT per annum. Compost is a soil conditioner which improves carbon content, as well as sodium, potassium and phosphorus content in the soil, and improves soil health and productivity. The present carbon content in soil is between 0.25 to 0.5 % which needs to be raised to 0.75% to 1% to boost the desired agricultural growth in the country of 4%.

Of the 56 waste-to-compost plants, 45 plants are working at sub-optimal levels, producing only 1.5 lakh MT of compost annually, while 11 plants are non-functional. Another 42 plants, with a total installed annual capacity of 7.25 lakh MT are under construction.

As far as waste to energy is concerned, the current potential is for producing 700 MW of power from the 1.7 lakh MTD of municipal solid waste being generated. Of this, the current installed capacity (from five functional waste-to-energy plants) is 53 MW, and another 55.6 MW from five non-functional plants. Another 20 waste-to-energy plants, with a combined capacity of 198.4 MW are under construction, while an additional five plants

with combined capacity of 117 MW are under tendering, bringing the total envisaged capacity to 424 MW across 35 possible waste-to-energy plants.

The Cabinet has now approved the recommendations of the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, for providing market development assistance of Rs. 1,500 per Metric Ton (MT) of city compost, for scaling up production and consumption of the product.

Additionally, the Cabinet has also approved the mandatory purchase of 100% power from all the waste-to energy plants in the state, by the distribution licensee(s) in the country, in the ratio of their procurement of power from all sources including their own, at the tariff determined by the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission. The applicable tariff for the year 2015-16 is Rs. 7.90/kWh for Refused Derived Fuel (RDF) based power plants, and Rs. 7.04/kWh for MSW based power plant.

These landmark decisions by the Cabinet are expected to give a significant boost to the financial viability of waste-to-compost and waste-to-energy plants across the country, facilitate their performance to potential, and propel forward the achievement of mandate of 100% scientific management of municipal solid waste, under Swachh Bharat Mission.