

Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs

Shri Hardeep Singh Puri launches Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge across 243 Cities

Challenge to Prevent Hazardous Cleaning of Sewers and Septic Tanks

Mechanized Cleaning to be Promoted

On-Ground Assessment of Cities in May 2021 and Results on Independence Day

World Toilet Day Celebrated

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Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, MoS, I/C, Housing and Urban Affairs today stated that Government of India is committed to ensure that no person needs to enter a sewer or septic tank, unless absolutely unavoidable in the interest of greater public hygiene. Launching the Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge at a webinar in New Delhi, he added that within this context we are today setting another milestone by launching the Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge which aims to ensure that no life of any sewer or septic tank cleaner is ever lost again owing to the issue of 'hazardous cleaning'. He further said that this is in line with our Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision who has always placed the safety and dignity of sanitation workers at the core of the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U).

The Challenge, aptly launched on the occasion of World Toilet Day, is aimed at preventing 'hazardous cleaning' of sewers and septic tanks and promote their mechanized cleaning. The virtual event saw the Chief Secretaries, State Mission Directors and other senior State/ Union Territory and city officials coming together to take a pledge on behalf of 243 cities to mechanize all sewer and septic tank cleaning operations by 30th April 2021, and gave their commitment to work towards preventing any deaths from hazardous entry. The Webinar was also attended by Secretaries of Ministry of Social Justice, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, who spoke about how their Ministries were contributing to the cause of mechanizing such cleaning practices.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Puri said, "The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (2013) and various judgements of Hon'ble Supreme Court expressly prohibit hazardous cleaning, i.e. manual entry into a septic tank or sewer without protective gear and observing operating procedures. Despite this, recurring episodes of human fatalities among those engaged in cleaning of septic tanks and sewers, typically belonging to the economically disadvantaged and marginalized communities of society, continue to be an issue of concern." Shri Puri highlighted that the success of the challenge does not only depend on the intent and commitment of political representatives, bureaucrats or Municipal authorities but also on the citizens of the country. He added that just like citizens have taken complete ownership of the Swachhata of their cities, their involvement in this endeavor is absolutely crucial. He appealed to everyone to be vigilant and responsible and play their part in saving the lives of the Sanitation or Swachhata Commandos.

Explaining the contours of the Challenge, Shri Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, MoHUA said "The Challenge will focus extensively on creating citizen awareness on this critical issue along with infrastructure creation for mechanized cleaning and capacity building of workforce. Along with this, a dedicated helpline number has been set up to register complaints and provide real-time solutions on desludging or sewer overflow. The actual on-ground assessment of participating cities will be conducted in May 2021 by an independent agency and results of the same will be declared on 15 August 2021." Cities will be awarded in three sub-categories – with population of more than 10 lakhs, 3-10 lakhs and upto 3 lakhs, with a total prize money of Rs 52 crores to be given to winning cities across all categories.

The event saw the launch of a series of advisories prepared by Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO), MoHUA. These included a 'Training Module for Sanitary Workers on Cleaning of Sewer and Septic Tanks', a document on 'Equipment & Workforce Norms for Managing Waterborne Sanitation in India' and Consultative Document on 'Land Application of Faecal Sludge'. MoHUA also released a series of posters as part of a citizen centric behavior change communication campaign on the subject of hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks. All documents released today are available on the Swachh Bharat Mission -Urban portal.

The second half of the event was an Open Forum in the format of a panel discussion where several States and cities such as Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Surat, Hyderabad and Ludhiana shared their experiences and best practices on the subject of 'Manhole to Machine Hole Transformation'. The panelists were joined by National Safai Karmacharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC), Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) and Delhi Jal Board, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) and sewer/ septic tank equipment manufacturer Kam Avida who shared their offerings of products and services to complement MoHUA's efforts in the Challenge.

Since its launch in 2014, SBM-U has made significant progress in the area of both sanitation and solid waste management. 4337 Urban local bodies (ULBs) have been declared open defecation free (ODF) (except 35 ULBs of West Bengal), 1319 cities certified ODF+ and 489 cities certified ODF++. Moreover, over 62 lakhs individual household toilets and over 5.9 lakhs community/ public toilets have been constructed. Additionally, over 59,900 toilets across 2900+ cities have been made live on Google Maps. In the area of solid waste management, 97% of wards have 100% door-to door collection while 67% of the total waste generated is being processed. A total of six cities have been certified as 5 Star, 86 as 3 star and 64 as 1 star under the Star Rating Protocol for Garbage Free Cities.

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