

## India's Solid Waste Management Framework

*Mains: GS III - Environmental Conservation & Waste Management*

### Why in News?

*The Supreme Court directed MoEF&CC to create guidelines for imposing and collecting environmental compensation under the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026.*

### What is Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026?

- **SWM Rules, 2026** - It supersedes the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.
- **Notified under** - Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and came into full effect from April 1, 2026.
- **Objective** - To integrate the principles of Circular Economy and Extended Producer Responsibility, with a specific focus on efficient waste segregation and management.
- **'Polluter Pays' principle for non-compliance** - It includes cases of operating without registration, false reporting, submission of forged documents or improper solid waste management practices.

### What are the key Provisions of the SWM Rules, 2026?

- **Four-Stream Waste Segregation** - It mandates segregation of waste at the source into dry, wet, sanitary, and hazardous or special-care categories.

# TYPES OF WASTE & THEIR MANAGEMENT

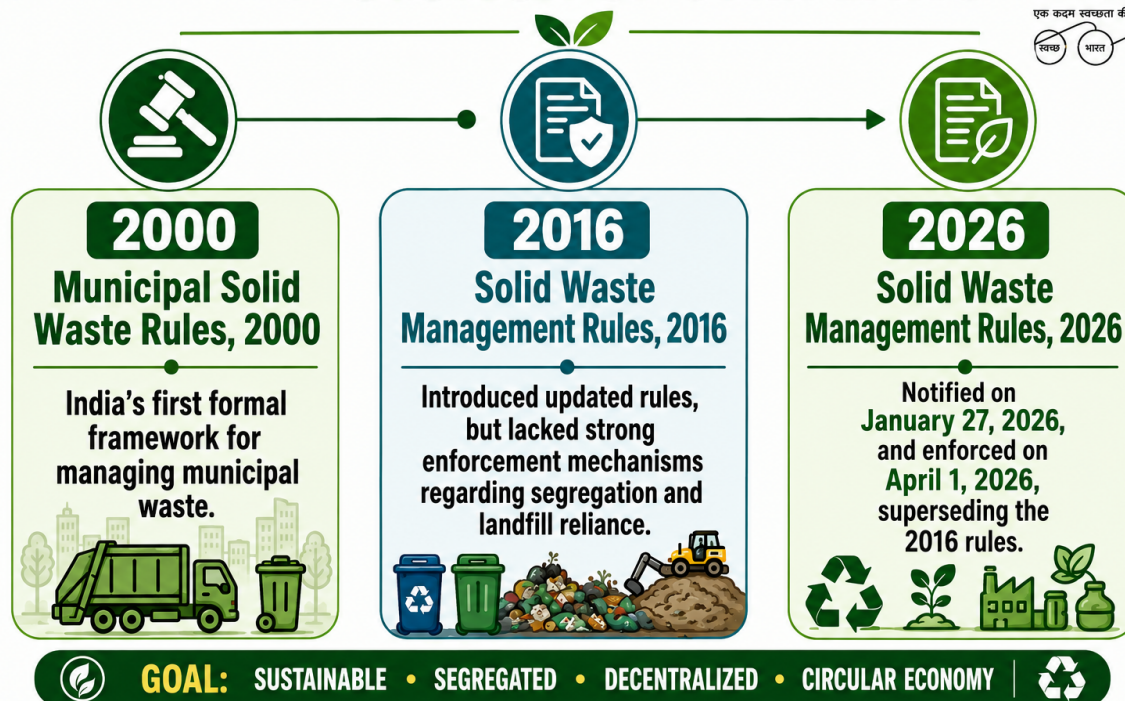


- **Circular Economy** - It promotes reduction, reuse, and local processing of waste instead of disposal at large dumping sites.
- **National Monitoring Portal** - It establishes a centralized digital platform to track municipal and rural waste data nationwide.
- **Producer and Bulk Generator Accountability** - It expands responsibilities for bulk waste generators.
- **Legacy Dumpsite Remediation** - It mandates time-bound actions to remediate historical landfills and dumping yards.
- **Rule 17 (Environmental Compensation)** - It requires the imposition of compensation on non-compliant entities in accordance with the polluter pays principle.

**What is the evolution of Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules?**



# EVOLUTION OF SWM LAWS



## What are the Supreme Court's guidelines on environmental compensation?

- **Key Principles for Environmental Compensation (Rule 17)**
- **Restitutionary Nature** - Compensation serves as an additional measure to penal fines and is intended to restore damaged environments, rather than replace fines.
- **Predictable and Structured Regime** - Compensation must adhere to transparent rules, enabling individuals and entities to anticipate specific penalties for defined violations.
- **Tangible and Intangible Damage** - Compensation calculations are required to address both observable losses and broader ecological or health-related impacts.
- **Potential or Imminent Harm** - Entities may be held liable if their activities present a significant risk of harm, even in the absence of actual damage.
- **Proportionality and Valuation** - The amount of compensation imposed must correspond directly to the extent and duration of the damage incurred.
- **High-Level Monitoring and Directives** - The Court established a Central Implementation Committee (CIC) to oversee implementation, provide guidance for the national online portal, and standardise compensation rules.
- The Court directed that collected compensation be maintained in a dedicated escrow account to be used exclusively for solid waste management projects.

## What are the challenges?

- **Systemic Breakdown in Collection & Transport** - Although urban areas claim over 95% waste collection, the waste is frequently mixed again in single-compartment trucks or transfer stations.
- This mixing contaminates organic waste and makes recyclable paper or plastic unusable, leaving dumping yards as the only disposal option.
- **Flawed Data & Unverified Reporting** - There is a discrepancy between official

records and actual conditions; official reports indicate high collection and processing rates, yet open dumpsites are still growing.

- CAG audits regularly expose inconsistencies in municipal reports.
- **Lack of Capacity at Local Bodies** - Many urban and rural local bodies lack the technical expertise, trained staff, and stable funding needed to operate processing facilities effectively.
- **Mismatch Between Tech Solutions and Market Demand** - Waste management facilities are often constructed without considering local waste composition or end-market demands.
- For example, Delhi's Okhla compost plant produces about 40 tonnes per day, which is far below its 200-tonne capacity due to limited regional demand.

### What steps should be taken?

- **Prioritise Source Segregation and Verification** - Require comprehensive multi-stream segregation at both household and bulk generator levels prior to investment in downstream processing facilities.
- Mandate installation of digital weighbridges at transfer stations and processing plants to ensure accuracy of reported waste tonnages.
- **Institute Third-Party Audits and Strengthen Governance**
- Conduct independent third-party audits to validate the accuracy of local waste management data.
- Impose stringent penalties for falsification of waste management data or misreporting on central data portals.
- **Leverage Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** - Integrate municipal data with the national waste portal utilising artificial intelligence and big data analytics to establish a **Decision Support System (DSS)**.
- Employ a technology suitability matrix to guide local authorities in selecting waste processing technologies aligned with local waste composition and market demand.
- **Ensure Rigorous Compensation Recovery** - Enforce the Supreme Court-mandated compensation regime, ensuring that collected penalties are allocated to dedicated local waste management escrow accounts.

### What lies ahead?

- Going forward, the focus is expected to shift from framing laws to ensuring effective implementation.
- The Supreme Court has laid down a framework for determining environmental compensation under the SWM Rules, 2026, and directed the Environment Ministry to formulate comprehensive guidelines for its imposition and collection.

### Reference

[Indian Express | Solid Waste Management](#)



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