

Plastic Waste Management (Second Amendment) Rules, 2021

What is the issue?

The Union government notified the Plastic Waste Management (Second Amendment) Rules, 2021 allowing recycled plastic in food packaging.

What was the earlier case of recycled plastic?

- The 2016 rule mentions that carry bags or products made of recycled plastic shall not be used for storing, carrying, dispensing or packaging ready to eat or drink foodstuff.
- In 2018, the FSSAI banned the use of recycled plastic or newspaper for packaging of food items from July 1, 2019.

What is the new amendment about?

- The new rules provide a moratorium of 10 years to big companies to keep polluting since more single-use plastic products will be added to the phase-out list only after a decade.
- It has also allowed the use of recycled plastics for packing food products.

What are the concerns of using recycled plastic?

- India recycles 60 per cent of its plastic waste and most of this is done by the informal workforce in the country.
- Industrial packaging happens to be the highest user of plastic.
- The unscientific methods used by the informal workforce to produce plastic pellets raise concerns, especially around the contamination and purity of the recycled plastic.
- Plastic is used in a variety of sectors ranging from medicines, electronic equipment to chemical fertilizers and using such plastics in food contact applications is a concern.
- No standards were prescribed for recycling of plastic making it difficult to understand the chemical conformity of the recycled plastic.
- A growing body of research proves there is migration of chemicals (additives) from plastics to the food.

What are the global practices regarding the use of recycled plastics?

- In the U.S., manufacturers are responsible for ensuring that the recycled product is of suitable purity.
- The European Union has come up with a 'plastic strategy' in 2018 to transform the way plastic products are designed, produced, used and recycled in the EU.
- Korea's Ministry of Food and Drug Safety revised its legislation allowing only chemically recycled resins in parts that do not come into direct contact with food.
- The Chinese agency is now conducting an industry survey and initiating a risk assessment method for recycled food contact materials.

What are the recommendations for India?

- Our plastic has to be recycled in authorised recycling facilities.
- The use of recycled plastic should have been mandated for non-food applications initially to understand the issues.
- An inventory of the types of processes for recycling is needed and the safe method has to be identified and used for food contact applications.
- Guidelines on the source of the post-consumer plastic waste, type of polymer that can be used, the average time of plastic-food contact, temperature of the food, etc. are required.
- A working mechanism needs to be developed with all the stakeholders including MoEFCC, FSSAI, CPCB, SPCB, Urban Local Bodies, representatives of the plastic industry as well as consumers.

Source: Down to Earth