

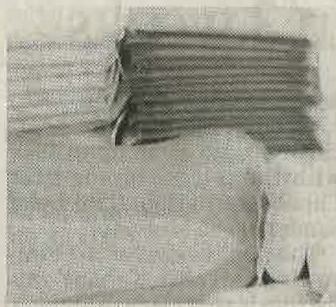
Improper disposal of sanitary pads a climate concern

KAVITA BAJELI-DATT @ New Delhi

STAIN-FREE, stay-in-place, no leakage, comfortable to wear, and light on the pocket are women's top priorities when they buy commercial sanitary napkins. But what they don't consider is their safe disposal, and how over 12 billion of these non-biodegradable pads are filling our landfills, sewerage system, water bodies and fields, therefore posing a colossal environmental and health risks.

As the decomposition of sanitary pads takes over 500 years, what is needed, experts said on the occasion of World Environment Day, that manufacturers of these products should not use toxic material in them as 90 per cent of them have plastic and other materials like superabsorbent polymers (SAP), chemicals, and cellulosic materials.

According to Bishwanath Sinha, Director, Policy and Technical Support, WaterAid India, an international charity that works in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene services, while the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) specifies quality standards for



sanitary pads, these standards are not mandatory and not enforced strictly.

"Thus, manufacturers do not have to reveal the composition of their products," he told this paper. Though India has come out with Solid Waste Management (SWM) rules, only a few cities, like Indore, have been successful in the safe disposal and management of disposable sanitary napkins.

Sinha added that the health and environmental impact is more pronounced because of the unorganised and informal ways of municipal solid waste management, including poor segregation, low community collection, lack of sufficient disposal and transportation networks in cities and villages, and limited infrastructure for

India's effort to regulate plastic is commendable: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Monday has lauded the country's efforts in tackling plastic pollution on the occasion of World Environment Day. He addressed the people, policymakers and foreign delegates meet via video message and underlined that India has already undertaken significant efforts since 2018 for plastic pollution in two phases- a ban on single-use plastic and compulsory plastic waste processing. He expressed happiness that India has worked continuously in this direction for the past 4-5 years. "India started working on two levels to get rid of single-use plastic in 2018" says Modi. "On the one hand, India has banned single-use plastic while on the other hand, plastic waste processing has been made mandatory" he added.

scientific disposal. Thus, these materials, when disposed of carelessly in the open, can pollute soil and water sources and release harmful toxins when burned in the open, in burning chambers, and in unregulated incinerators. Also, while many government bodies and organisations are enthusiastic about implementing incinerators, concerns arise regarding their proper installation, including sufficient ventilation, added Snehal Pawar, Assistant Manager, Ujaas, an initiative of Aditya Birla Education Trust (ABET). This social enterprise focuses on bridging the gap in menstrual health.

"It has been observed that numerous schools, colleges, and institutes possess such machines;

however, they often remain non-functional due to inadequate maintenance," she said. She added that in many cases, girls are not given proper demonstrations on using them, leading them to dispose of sanitary napkins inappropriately, such as throwing them out of windows or flushing them down toilets. However, in India, which has approximately 35.5 crore women who menstruate - 89.6% in urban areas and 72.8% in rural areas - there are taboos and superstitions still attached to the burning of sanitary napkins. What is essential is waste segregation - right at the source - when implementing menstrual waste solutions like incineration, deep burial, chemical treatment, and recycling, said Agarwal.

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