

Allow reuse of PET drinking water bottles: experts

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India may consider making PET bottles reusable and allow them to be used for packaging water more than once if the government agrees to recommendations made by experts drawn from various departments and scientific institutions.

Currently, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) doesn't allow the repeated use of PET drinking water bottles. On the contrary, the experts from various ministries as well as Bureau of Indian Standards, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and Indian Institute of Packaging think that it should be allowed as the move may reduce the use of single-use plastics considerably.

This suggestion came up during a high-level meeting organised at the behest of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs on September 9, said V K Duindi, Deputy Director General (Policy Planning) at the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) here on Tuesday.

He said even though the BIS has a standard for compostable plastic (which is mainly plant-derived), but that cannot be used for packaging drinking water. The experts suggested that the bureau should come out with a new standard for compostable plastic suitable for packing liquids such as water.

Among other recommendations was that plastic layer used in paper-based packaging materials should be made of compostable plastic and so should be the case with multi-layer plastic.

Ram Vilas Paswan, Minister for Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, during a press conference here, said that many States have already come out with orders that either prohibit or restrict the use of single-use plastics. In his latest Mann ki Baath programme last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged people to shun the use of single-use plastics and reduce its application to the minimum possible by October 2, the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

However, Paswan also said that banning the use of single use plastics all at once is not a solution as other options available are expensive. The alternatives being proposed should meet at least three significant conditions: they should be affordable for people, good enough to win the trust of users as well as adequate transparent so that the consumers can see the content, he said.

While most departments and public sector units under the ministry have already stopped using single-use plastics, the Food Corporation of India (FCI), under the Department of Food and Public Distribution, is exploring ways to replace plastic bags used for storing food grains with those made of jute. "Already 85 per cent of bags FCI uses are made of jute, and only 15 per cent is plastic bags. We want to stop even that," Paswan said adding that he was convening a meeting of FCI officials next week to prepare a timeline for this.

According to Paswan, India currently generates 95 lakh tonnes of plastic waste annually, of which 38 lakh tonnes are of single-use plastic. Every year, 6 lakh tonnes of plastic waste from India land up in oceans. If measures are not taken immediately, the amount of plastic waste generated will double by 2022, the minister said.