

State mulls ban on import of plastic bags

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Mumbai Following the clampdown on illegally manufactured plastic bags below 50 microns, the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) is planning to ban large scale import of plastic bags into the state.

"Maharashtra has around 500 plastic bag manufacturing units. However, a major share is imported from other states. We now plan to meet the Home department officials to urge them to tighten vigil at toll nakas. Import of plastic below 50 microns has to be checked," said Mahesh Pathak, member secretary of MPCB, on Wednesday.

MPCB sources said lakhs of thin plastic bags are brought into the city from Gujarat, Diu-Daman etc. "Outside Maharashtra, several states are allowed to manufacture even 20 micron thick plastic bags," said an MPCB official. According to him, a major share of plastic bags comes from illegal fly-by-night manufacturers who can set up temporary factories with an investment of Rs 3 to 10 lakh. In coming days, three squads set up by the MPCB will carry out covert enquiries to locate the whereabouts of these units.

"Besides manufacturers, importers and customers also should be checked and penalised," he said.

Agreeing that customers and users have to be restricted to reduce the use of plastic, Valsa Nair Singh, environment secretary, said, "In fact, we plan for a proposal to levy a 30 per cent green tax on consumers demanding plastic bags from stores and hawkers."

On September 17, 2009, the MoEF had issued a draft notification calling for a nationwide ban on plastic bags below 50 micron. The notification that is currently inviting suggestions and amendments from states will be finalised by the end of the year. Singh said, "In a list of suggestions which will sent to the ministry on Wednesday, we have specified that no plastic bag should be given free of cost to consumers and a cost should be printed on all bags. The charge could be as low as 50 paise," she said.