

Hyderabad: Neeri to help dissolve Ganesha idols with baking soda

DECCAN CHRONICLE. | DONITA JOSE

Published Aug 6, 2017, 1:34 am IST

Updated Aug 6, 2017, 1:34 am IST

Ammonium sulphate derived after dissolving plaster of Paris idols can be used as a fertiliser for plants.



Ganesha idols

Hyderabad: The leavening soda in your kitchen can now save a lake. In its latest breakthrough, the National Environment Engineering Institute (Neeri) here has developed a method to harmlessly dissolve plaster of paris (PoP) idols. Neeri plans to try out the method at many immersion ghats in the city. Neeri would be using leavening soda, or ammonium bicarbonate, to dissolve the PoP idols, which would otherwise remain as toxic sludge in the water, taking months to decompose.

The ammonium bicarbonate would be added to the water in the ghat, resulting in the PoP disintegrating into calcium bicarbonate and ammonium sulphate.

Ammonium sulphate is a known fertiliser that can be directly applied to the plants, said an environmental engineer with Neeri. This salt would float on top of the water in aqueous form; it can be used to reduce the alkalinity of the soil. Calcium carbonate settles at the bottom, and can be dredged up and used to manufacture cement.

This project would be taken up on an experimental basis this year. “When the idols are released into the water, the PoP and toxic heavy metals add to the hardness of the water, affecting oxygen levels and aquatic life greatly,” said Neeri Hyderabad head and principal scientist Dr Shaikh Basha. Last year over one lakh Ganesh pandals had been registered in the GHMC area. With only 141 lakes, the average load on each lake

would be 500 idols on average. “There are many immersion based festivals which pollute the lakes. Ideally they must be stopped. Until then, people should use the exclusive ghats where we can dissolve the idols and make fertilisers,” said MsMadhulikaChoudhary of Dhruvansh, an NGO that is volunteering with Neeri for the project.

The 15 new immersion ghats are yet to be completed, raising questions on whether the lakes would suffer the onslaught of pollution this year too. Dr Basha reiterated the technique in no way should encourage people to use PoP idols. “The National Green Tribunal has suggested a ban on PoP, and it remains banned in many parts of the country. Despite that it is widely used, forcing us to come up with alternatives,” he said.