

'Learn from China on how to make energy from waste'

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NAGPUR: Even after 16 years of municipal solid waste rules being in place and India spending more than Rs10,000 crore in treatment of waste, not a single municipal corporation out of the 8,000 in the country can claim to manage solid waste in the best possible way.

This was one of the major points that came up for discussion on the first day of the international conference on 'Integrated solid waste management practices in developing countries'. Jointly organized by National Environmental and Engineering Research Institute (Neeri), Government Institute of Science, Nagpur, and Government Institute of Forensic Science, the conference was held under the aegis of Clean India Mission initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Nickolas Themelis, founder and director of the Earth Engineering Center at Columbia University and the Global Waste to Energy Research and Technology Council, participated in the conference through a webinar. "The generation of waste in Asian and African countries has trebled since 1950 and will further increase by six times by 2030," said Themelis.

Stating that most of the Asian municipal solid waste is landfilled, Themelis said, "If we were to dump the global municipal waste at one landfill, we would use up a land surface equal to metropolitan Paris," he added.

Another consensus was on India being in a good position to form technical and economic partnership with China to start phasing out landfilling. "China has around 200 waste-to-energy plants running successfully, releasing less dioxin emissions. India should decide to grow in the same way," experts said.

Presenting a critique on the amended Municipal Solid Waste Rules, 2016, Asit Nema, an independent consultant and environment engineer, called them impractical and utopian. "The new rules prohibit disposal of organic in landfills but mandate installation of landfill gas collection, making the implementation part more difficult," said Nema.

Despite a large number of treatment plants becoming dysfunctional, the rules still show preference for technology. Added Nema, "Too much focus on treatment won't take us anywhere. No outcomes are defined in terms of environment and public health."

Thomas Gross and Lena Breitenmoser from the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW) presented a case study on city's Kalamna market and found biodegradable waste generated from the vegetable and fruit market to be a source for anaerobic digestion and biogas production. "Per year, 6,278 tonne of waste is generated from the Kalamna market which is going to a landfill. Preliminary results show promising potential for generating biogas," they said.