

AN APPEAL FROM THE RESIDENTS OF

This is an appeal from the residents of Auroville, Pondicherry, and the neighboring villagers, to protect public health by ensuring proper waste management at the Karuvadikuppam landfill of Pondicherry Municipality. We also recommend relocation of the landfill to a more suitable site.

The problem: release of toxic fumes and leachates

For almost 40 years now, unsegregated urban waste from the Pondicherry Municipality is being dumped at Karuvadikuppam, just a few kilometers away from the international township of Auroville. At the present moment, about 400 tonnes of wastes are being dumped every day in the site in question.

The waste is allowed to burn on a regular basis. Due to lack of segregation, plastic waste mixed in with the garbage also burns. As a result, residents who live in the vicinity are smothered by thick, heavy toxic fumes of burning plastic emanating from this landfill. In recent years, given the exponential increase of plastic waste (about 40 tonnes/day), this problem has reached catastrophic proportions, creating a serious health hazard.

Also, given the monsoon and the age of the landfill, toxins produced by the burning or from hazardous waste, leach into the groundwater that is used for drinking purpose by the residents.

The health hazard

Open air burning of plastic creates some of the most deadly toxins known to science—dioxins, furans and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). These toxins travel a long way from the point of emission and are highly carcinogenic even in trace quantities. Dioxins are also hormone disruptors that cause reproductive and developmental problems and damage the immune system. Dioxins have a long life time accumulating in our body-fat and transmitted by mothers directly to their unborn babies.

For more info: http://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public_health/dioxins/en/

The affected area lies in the greenbelt of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu. Agriculture is practised in the area. The dioxins contaminate the crops and our waterways and are thus ingested by the residents.

Biomedical waste

Another cause for concern if not alarm is that the recent report of the Comptroller and Auditor General which, after reviewing the management of biomedical waste in Pondicherry, has found improper oversight of biomedical waste and the mixing of biomedical waste with municipal waste. The CAG appears to have also opined that the possibility of instances of improper disposal of biomedical waste and violation of biomedical waste rules by some medical establishments cannot be ruled out. The burning of such mixed waste will generate toxic products that are again released into the air and the waterways. Coupled with the infective nature of biomedical waste, the landfill is clearly a ticking time bomb.

Dangers to aviation

The Pondicherry airport, which is adjacent to the landfill, is currently being expanded to serve 300 passengers a day, with commercial domestic flights starting in October 2011. There are serious threats to aviation, given the low visibility due to smoke from the landfill and the high concentration of birds that are attracted to the landfill.

The affected population

- * 150 gypsies have been settled right next to the landfill, and they are the worst affected population subject to the toxins 24 hours a day.

- * Auroville, a universal town, supported by the Govt. of India and UNESCO, with an international resident population of 2000, 4000 commuting workers, and 2000 daily tourists.

- * Villages in Tamil Nadu in the vicinity of the landfill, especially Morattandi and Edyanchavadi with a population of 7,000.

- * Thousands of international tourists who flock Pondicherry and Auroville every year.

- * Residential areas of Pondicherry, particularly, Navarkulam, Nessvalarnagar and Lawspet with a population of 100,000.

The management of the Karuvadikuppam landfill, which has allowed for the uncontrolled burning of garbage, is in direct contravention of the laws of India as per the interim order of the Supreme Court of India (WP(C) 888/96 : Dt. 28/7/1997) and Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000 issued by the Government of India under sections 3, 6 and 25 of the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986.

We, the undersigned, representing all the affected people in the area appeal to you to take steps to relocate the landfill of Pondicherry Municipality from Karuvadikuppam and in the interregnum ensure proper management of the landfill. The authorities should take responsibility to ensure that there is no burning of waste and also segregate inorganic and organic waste for better management.

Thank you.