

New Solid Waste Management Framework - Explained

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Solid Waste Management Latest News

- The Union government has notified the **Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026**, making source-level processing of waste mandatory for bulk generators and local bodies across India.

Solid Waste Management in India: Status and Challenges

- Solid waste management is a critical urban governance challenge in India, driven by rapid urbanisation, changing consumption patterns, and population growth.
- According to recent estimates, India generates about **1.85 lakh tonnes of solid waste per day**, of which nearly **30-40% comes from bulk waste generators** such as residential societies, commercial complexes, institutions, and government buildings.
- Despite improvements in door-to-door collection and segregation under flagship initiatives like **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)**, waste processing has lagged behind waste generation.
- A significant share of collected waste continues to be dumped in landfills, leading to land degradation, groundwater contamination, air pollution, and public health risks.

- Poor segregation at source has been one of the most persistent bottlenecks, increasing the cost and inefficiency of downstream processing.

Regulatory Framework for Solid Waste Management

- India's solid waste governance is primarily guided by rules framed under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- The **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016** marked a shift from landfill-centric disposal to scientific waste management, emphasising segregation, decentralised processing, and waste-to-resource approaches.
- Key features of the earlier framework included:
 - Mandatory segregation of waste at source
 - Responsibilities assigned to urban local bodies (ULBs) for collection and processing
 - Inclusion of bulk waste generators within regulatory oversight
 - Promotion of composting, biomethanation, and recycling
- However, weak enforcement, limited institutional capacity of ULBs, and the absence of clear accountability mechanisms diluted the impact of these provisions.
- This regulatory gap has been addressed through the newly notified **SWM Rules, 2026**, which replace the decade-old regime.

News Summary

- The **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026**, notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, introduce a stricter compliance framework applicable from **April 1**.
- The most significant change is the **mandatory processing of waste at source by bulk generators**, who account for nearly one-third of India's total solid waste.

Core Principles of the New SWM Framework

- The revised framework is anchored in the concept of waste hierarchy, which prioritises:
 - Waste prevention and reduction, Reuse, Recycling, Recovery of energy and Disposal as a last resort
- Landfills are to be used only for non-recyclable, non-recoverable, and inert waste, reinforcing the transition towards a circular economy.
- Higher landfill fees have been prescribed for unsegregated waste to discourage dumping and incentivise source-level processing.

Expanded Scope of Bulk Waste Generators

- Entities qualifying as bulk waste generators include:
 - Buildings with a floor area of 20,000 sq. m. or more
 - Facilities consuming 40,000 litres of water per day or more
 - Entities generating 100 kg or more of waste per day
- This covers residential societies, universities, hostels, commercial establishments, and central and state government institutions.

Mandatory Segregation Norms

- The Rules prescribe **four mandatory waste streams**:
 - Wet waste, Dry waste, Sanitary waste and Special care waste (such as batteries, tube lights, and e-waste)
- This detailed categorisation aims to improve recycling efficiency and reduce contamination.

Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility

- **Bulk generators are required to:**
 - Process wet waste on-site wherever feasible
 - Obtain an Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR) certificate if on-site processing is not possible
 - Ensure environmentally sound collection, transport, and processing
- A centralised online monitoring portal will enable real-time tracking and enforcement.
- **New Powers for Local Bodies**
 - Local authorities in **hilly and island regions** have been empowered to levy user fees on tourists for waste management and regulate visitor numbers based on waste-handling capacity, recognising ecological fragility.

Significance of the New Rules

- The 2026 Rules shift the burden of waste management away from urban local bodies towards waste generators themselves, improving accountability and reducing fiscal stress on municipalities.
- By directly targeting the largest contributors to urban waste, the framework is expected to significantly enhance processing rates and reduce landfill dependence.

Source : IE

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