

Unchecked waste burning risk to public h

By Mukhtar Alam

KARACHI, Nov 25: With cases of throat infection and respiratory disease already on the rise in the winter, city dwellers are appalled at the inability of the cantonment boards and the city government to impose a clampdown on burning of solid waste in the open, believed to be producing noxious fumes and raising the pollution level.

Senior physician Dr Nadeem Rizvi has said commonly people get more chest infection in winter, a condition aggravated by exposure to dust and smoke.

"People who have already got chest diseases are more prone to get infections and acute asthma attacks in winter," he added.

Talking to *Dawn*, residents of various towns and those living in cantonment board-controlled areas and slums raised similar concerns over poor waste management, saying that while the open burning of municipal waste aggravates respiratory diseases among the people, the waste left for scavengers is not only an aesthetic and environmental nuisance, but it also serves as breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other insects.

It is not uncommon for people to get their garbage dumped at roadside rubbish collection points.

Garbage trucks of the city government, towns and cantonment boards ply defined routes, largely main roads, to collect waste from these dumps and transport it to designated landfill sites.

A number of citizens told *Dawn* that garbage bins are inadequate in many areas where rubbish is dumped in the open and in shanty towns where garbage is not collected at all people throw rubbish into open drains and any unoccupied piece

of land.

Sometimes town administrations which are responsible for the collection and lifting of solid waste and its dumping at designated landfill sites develop the habit of just "getting rid of the waste" by throwing it into the nearby depression areas, pits or some place outside their jurisdiction.

Over 10,000 tonnes of waste

According to an estimate, Karachi generates about 8,800 tonnes of municipal waste, besides about 2,000 tonnes of industrial waste, construction waste and hospital waste every day.

About 80 per cent of the waste is generated in the areas administered by the city government, said a source in the government.

A senior social worker said that the CDGK on the basis of a resolution passed by its council in June 2008 imposed a huge tax, effective from January 2009, on owners of residential as well as commercial plots for profiting from, among other services and infrastructure, the so-called solid waste management system.

"The city government despite opposition and public resentment continued the collection of the tax till the third quarter of the last financial year, but we have still to see proper service in return for the taxes in the shape of any improved solid waste disposal system or facilities such as garbage stations, proper dustbins or scientifically developed landfill sites."

In June 2008, the city council of Karachi, following a move by the EDO of the municipal services of the CDGK, had given the authority to the CDGK for levying charges on citizens only for a door-to-door collection of solid waste and its dis-

posal at the designated landfill site.

The CDGK through the resolution of the city council, which was subsequently criticised by the citizens and political quarters, had so far earned an amount to the tune of Rs230 million, which remained unutilized so far, sources told *Dawn*.

The CDGK has not issued bills to consumers for solid waste or infrastructure taxes for the last about nine months, confided a government official.

Earlier, an agreement was signed by the city government and a foreign company about three years ago for the development and operation of the infrastructure for collection, transfer and final disposal and treatment of municipal solid waste, hazardous medical waste, industrial solid waste and other poisonous and harmful waste generated in the city.

However, the project is yet to see the light of day, while air pollution in the city continues to increase and affect the public health as a considerable part of the waste is still burnt in the open in almost all towns and cantonment areas.

Even, massive burning of solid waste either dumped by industrialists or some town administration in the Malir River bed along the causeway and on the road joining Korangi Industrial Area with Manzoor Colony and bridge side areas near Qayyumabad roundabout was witnessed on Thursday.

According to a scientist-turned-environmentalist, Mirza Arshad Ali Baig, this burning of municipal and industrial waste across the city is not only a clear violation of the country's environment laws, but also a constant source of massive air pollution in the city in general and in residential areas in particular.

"In a city like ours where vehicular emissions

are already a source of grave concern, the failure of civic agencies, environmental protection agency and the environment department in reducing the uncontrolled burning of solid waste is surely contributing to the overall increase of highly toxic and persistent chemicals in the environment," he said.

One can see smoke or haze/brown clouds in the sky over the Gondal Pass, a 500-acre landfill site developed 45 to 50 years ago, behind Orangi hills, landfill site in Surjani town, said an environmentalist.

Extremely dangerous fumes

A report prepared on the physical environment in various landfill sites and garbage collection and transportation points a couple of years ago, says that the smell of organic waste is spreading in the area.

"Particularly carbon monoxide with a concentration between 2.5ppm and 7.8ppm and carbon dioxide (386ppm-430ppm) is very high in the area of Gondal Pass, while particulate matter of 10 microns is suspended in the air at the rate of 309-329µm/m³."

A doctor says that dioxin emissions because of the open burning of the waste was dangerous even at extremely low levels and have been linked to several health problems, including cancer and development and reproductive disorders.

Waste smoke and fumes may contain hazardous pollutants like sulfur dioxide, lead, mercury and hexachlorobenzene, which have immediate and long-term effects on health like asthma, emphysema and other respiratory diseases, nervous system, kidney or liver damage, the doctor warns.

Threat to public health

*Environment -
Solid waste*

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Playing as environmental watchdog, the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) had been writing letters to officers concerned in all the 18 towns of Karachi.

A director at Sepa, Waqar H Phulpoto, said that the high-ups in the provincial environment department as well as the provincial minister for environment and alternative energy, Sheikh Mohammad Afzal, were also concerned about the hazards of improper handling and dumping of solid waste and its subsequent burning in the air.

"We on the basis of some evidence available with Sepa regarding disposal and subsequent burning of solid waste in ground depressions, pits and on streets interact with the town authorities and ask them to ensure that no subsequent burning of waste take place," he noted.

When contacted the EDO of the Municipal Services group of offices of the city government, Masood Alam, admitted that about 5,000 tonnes of the 9,000 tonnes solid waste generated in the city every day was either left in the open ground or thrown in drains.

"Under the existing laws the towns are responsible for the management of the waste till its shifting to the landfill sites which are developed and overseen by the CDGK's municipal service department."

He further said that the problem of careless dumping and burning of solid-wastes could not be addressed meaningfully in the megalopolis unless an integrated waste management solution under one umbrella and unity of command was in place through some new legislations.

Doing work in bits and pieces or disintegrated approach would not serve any purpose, he remarked.