


Illegal brick kilns bake Cuttack in summer heat

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Brick kilns in Cuutack

CUTTACK: With mercury hovering above 40 degree Celsius, mushrooming of illegal brick kilns have added to the heat misery in Cuttack district. Environmentalists have opined that these brick kilns are responsible for rise in temperature in the region as well as land degradation and air pollution. Moreover, the district administration has failed to curb the menace, leaving the residents fuming.

As per reports, despite a restriction imposed by State Pollution Control Board (SPCB), more than 5,000 illegal brick kilns are operating in all the 15 tehsils of the district. If sources are to be believed, these brick kilns are being run by influential persons in connivance with local revenue officials. The maximum number of these kilns is operating in Nischintakoili, Mahanga and Salepur tehsils.

Most of the kilns have been set up in agriculture land close to habitations, schools, temples and even monuments protected by State Archaeology Department and Archaeological Survey of India.

The brick kiln owners dig up earth continuously from December to May to manufacture bricks. Each unit spreads over two to five acres of land and produces around 10 to 15 lakhs bricks during this period. And in the process, they render the land unsuitable for agriculture by degrading the fertility of the soil. Sources said rampant operation of illegal brick kilns has left large patches of fertile land barren.

A kiln uses about eight tonnes of wood in the furnace during the brick-making season. The use of such a huge quantity of wood is one of the causes of pollution and deforestation in the coastal district, says Pradipta Kishore Mishra, an environmentalist. The kilns are also causing soil erosion due to continuous digging of earth, he added.

Moreover, brick kiln owners prefer to produce more bricks in April and May as the clay dries up fast during peak summer. This has led to rise in mercury level in the vicinity of the kilns. Though locals are complaining of health-related problems due to the illegal kilns, no action has been taken against the owners.

While the huge volume of carbon dioxide emanating from the kilns is polluting the atmosphere, sources said the local revenue officials are looking the other way. In some cases, the officials impose a minimum fine and even accept illegal gratification from the kiln owners.

When contacted, Cuttack Collector Nirmal Chandra Mishra said the district administration has directed all Tehsildars to form special squads and take action against illegal brick kilns with help of officials of SPCB's regional office. However, the directive is not being followed properly, he said.

On the other hand, Tehsildars say they have no power to take instant action to curb the menace. "We have no power to shut down or demolish the illegal kilns except imposing a fine on the owners," said Nischintakoili Tehsildar Debasis Patnaik.

This apart, officials of SPCB's regional office and Directorate of Factories and Boilers are not cooperating with revenue officials in curbing the menace, he added.

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