

Executive Summary

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*Guwahati, the gateway to the North Eastern Region (NER) of India is the largest and fastest growing commercial and industrial centre in the Region. The pressure of the ever increasing human population and expanding commercial and industrial activities has resulted in generation of enormous municipal as well as other wastes and industrial effluents. Previous Audits which looked at the Solid Waste Management activities in the Guwahati Municipal Corporation and functioning of the Auto Emission Testing Centres implemented by the Transport Department of the Government of Assam have indicated significant risks of degradation of land, air and water in and around Guwahati city. Besides, media reports also suggested increase in the pollution levels, adversely affecting the general public. In order to examine the level of environmental degradation and the role of the Pollution Control Board, Assam (PCBA) in maintaining a balance between developmental activities and environmental conservation, a Performance Audit (PA) was conducted on the topic ‘**Environmental Degradation in the Greater Guwahati Area – with special emphasis on the role of Pollution Control Board of Assam**’.*

The PA revealed that though the PCBA was not short of funds, it had not fulfilled its role effectively. Instead of focussing on strengthening its technical manpower for carrying out the essential inspection of industrial establishments and scientific analysis of air and water samples, the PCBA had a disproportionately large non-technical staff which resulted in huge arrears in mandatory inspections.

(Paragraph 2.1)

Use-based categorisation of water for identification of various water bodies had not been done leading to risk of using unsuitable water bodies for drinking water. Further, only 24 out of 55 Water polluting Parameters identified by the Central Pollution Control Board were being monitored by the PCBA.

(Paragraphs 3.1 & 3.2)

The Dissolved Oxygen (DO), Bio-chemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) and Total Coliform (TC) levels in the Bharalu river were far beyond the stipulated criteria indicating severe organic pollution and the river water had reached a stage where no aquatic organism can survive. Although this river had been categorised by the CPCB among the 35 most polluted river stretches in the country in terms of water quality criteria, the PCBA had failed to prepare a Report and Action Plan as directed by the CPCB.

(Paragraph 3.4)

There was no Sewage Treatment Plant in the entire state of Assam resulting in untreated sewage being discharged from various generating points to natural water bodies thereby increasing the risk of organic and bacterial contamination in the water bodies.

(Paragraph 3.7)

There was a shortfall of 68 per cent to 84 per cent in mandatory inspections of Industries conducted by the PCBA. In four out of nine industries jointly inspected along with Audit, effluent treatment plants were either not installed or not functioning resulting in discharge of untreated effluents containing oil, grease etc. into the water bodies.

(Paragraphs 3.8 & 4.4.2)

The PCBA was monitoring only three out of twelve air pollutants notified by the Central Pollution Control Board for being monitored. Besides, all air monitoring stations were located in residential areas whereas there was no station in high population/vehicular density areas or in commercial, industrial and eco-sensitive areas.

(Paragraphs 4.1 & 4.2)

Only 6 out of 35 highly polluting industries installed online Continuous Stack Emission Monitoring Systems and none of the units had installed the online effluent quality monitoring system till the deadline as mandated by CPCB expired in March 2015. The PCBA did not install necessary software and hardware for centralised data collection, analysis and corrective action.

(Paragraph 4.4.5)

Pollution Under Control certificates were issued on the verbal request of vehicle owners without physical presence of vehicles. Joint physical inspection of 9 out of 38 Pollution Testing Centres revealed that in four centres there were no testing machine/equipment while in other two centres, testing machine/equipment were available but were not in working condition even though they were issuing Pollution Under Control certificates.

(Paragraph 4.5.2)

Even after 14 years of the enactment of the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Rules stipulating for authorisation by the State Pollution Control Board for creating a landfill, the GMC had not obtained such approval from the PCBA for the MSW landfill at Boragaon. More importantly, the dumping site is located adjacent to the world heritage 'Deepor Beel' posing severe threat to the fragile eco-system of the Lake.

(Paragraph 5.2)

836 health care establishments (HCEs) were functioning without obtaining authorisation from the PCBA in violation of Bio-Medical Waste Rules. Besides, despite lapse of more than 12 years after the scheduled date prescribed in the BMW Rules, 56 HCEs in Guwahati neither had their own waste treatment facilities nor had tie-up with other Common Bio-Medical Waste Treatment Facilities.

(Paragraphs 6.1 & 6.2)

Out of 243 hazardous waste generating industries, 185 industries (76 per cent) were functioning without obtaining authorisation from the PCBA. As a result, the PCBA was not in possession of information regarding the total quantity of hazardous waste generated in the State.

(Paragraph 7.1)

There were 15 unregistered plastic manufacturing/ recycling units, but the PCBA had not taken any action against them. As a result, in Guwahati city, plastic carry bags of less than 40 microns were being sold/used openly despite a District Administration ban on such use.

(Paragraph 7.2)

The sole battery dealer registered with the PCBA had sold 19.17 lakh new batteries but collected only 69 per cent of the used batteries against the requirement for collecting 90 per cent of the same, resulting in 3.94 lakh used batteries remaining unaccounted for.

(Paragraph 7.3)

During 2013-14, 20.046 MT of e-waste was collected by five producers/bulk consumers and transported to other States for dismantling/recycling without the knowledge of the PCBA.

(Paragraph 7.4)