

Save Cuddalore from Industrial Overkill

Cuddalore is a toxic hotspot.

- In 1998, the Tamilnadu State Human Rights Commission declared that public health in the SIPCOT industrial estate “cannot take more burden than that which has already ensued by the existing chemical industries.” The report recommends that no more polluting industries be set up in the region.
- In 1999, prompted by the pollution due to the existing industries, the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute recommended that a Regional EIA be conducted before commissioning Phase II of the industrial estate.
- In 1999, the Semmankuppam Panchayat within whose jurisdiction SIPCOT Phase II lies, issued a resolution prohibiting the setting up of polluting or water-intensive industries.
- In September 2004 and May 2005, air quality studies conducted by the SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors (SACEM) found 24 toxic chemicals in the air breathed by SIPCOT residents. Many of these chemicals, including known human carcinogens, were found at levels between 1000 and 20,000 times higher than safe limits.
- Local communities complain that children and youth have suffered disproportionately. Pollution has affected children’s mental, physical and sexual development, according to mothers living in SIPCOT.

Two decades of complaints by the residents of SIPCOT have fallen on deaf ears. Rather than make conditions healthier for the residents, the Tamilnadu Government seems to have dedicated SIPCOT Cuddalore to polluting industries.

Government Revives Chemplast’s PVC Plant Proposal

- Chemplast Sanmar has a controversial track record, and is accused of having polluted hundreds of wells and thousands of acres of agricultural land in Mettur Dam, where its flagship chemical units are located. The Company has also been caught discharging highly poisonous effluents containing Vinyl Chloride, Ethylene Di Chloride, Chloroform and Methylene Chloride into the River Kaveri upstream of TWAD Board’s drinking water intake wells.
- On 7 June, 2002, at a public hearing organised by Cuddalore District Collector, residents of SIPCOT rejected a proposal by Chemplast Sanmar to set up a 170,000 tonnes/year PVC facility.
- On July 24, 2003, the International Finance Corporation which was considering a loan of \$20 million for Chemplast’s Cuddalore project cancelled the company’s application. This was prompted by the fact that local communities had communicated to IFC their massive opposition to the PVC project.
- Having been rejected by the Cuddalore community, the company relocated its proposal to Krishnapatnam in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. It was rejected by the community here too. The Collector concluded the statutory public hearing on 19 November 2003 stating that the hearing was attended by a large gathering consisting of various cross sections of people and political parties and all the public who attended objected vehemently the setting up of the proposed PVC project at Krishnapatnam.
- It has been learnt that the TNPCB has already given a “No Objection

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Certificate” to the project and the matter is now pending with the Ministry of Environment and Forests for consideration.

- In its modified plan, Chemplast reportedly proposes to reduce production to 1,40,000 tonnes/year, install a 2800 cubic metre/day desalination plant, and replace the VCM incinerator with a vent gas scrubber. All the trade effluents and rejects from the desalination plant will be discharged at sea. Also, the company has reportedly indicated that it will sink borewells to draw 2800 cubic metres/day of water as a contingency.
- The current proposal is for an entirely new project with a different set of environmental impacts. However, no fresh EIA or public hearing has been conducted, and the TNPCB has taken a decision to issue a “No Objection Certificate” without evaluating the potential impacts of the new proposal.
- Also, the EIA based on which NOC has been granted was conducted in 1999 – more than 6 years ago. Since that time, a facility to manufacture the highly explosive rocket fuel Ammonium Perchlorate has come up adjacent to Chemplast’s proposed site. Chemplast’s raw material VCM is also a highly explosive and flammable substance. Granting permission without considering the combined and/or domino impact of an explosion in either unit is unwise.
- Subsequent to the December 26 Tsunami, it becomes imperative for projects with sea-front or marine components to assess the hazard potential of Tsunamis, and identify mitigation or management measures. This has also not been insisted upon by the TNPCB.

The manner in which TNPCB has granted NOC to this highly controversial project reeks of irregularity and extraneous considerations..

The people of Cuddalore demand that:

- Chemplast Sanmar project be rejected;
- No further polluting units – new or expansion of existing ones – should be allowed in SIPCOT, Cuddalore.
- Clean and labour-intensive industries without an excessive dependence on groundwater should be invited to set up in Cuddalore.

Lend your support. Write, Call, Fax:

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