

# **Scorecard on Environment and Safety in SIPCOT, Cuddalore January to June 2006**

## **SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitoring**

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### **SIPCOT, Cuddalore: Regulatory Black Hole**

In the 6-month period from January to June 2006, SACEM reported a total of 20 major pollution and/or workplace incidents involving environmental damage, and/or injury or death of workers and residents. At least 5 persons have been injured and three killed during the data period. The number of fisherfolk who experienced skin injuries as a result of river pollution are not included in the data set. In the corresponding period from January to June 2005, SACEM recorded 24 major pollution and/or workplace incidents of a similar nature. Two people were injured and several bus commuters were gassed in the first half of 2005.

In 1999, National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) recommended that because of the high levels of pollution in SIPCOT, a Regional Environmental Impact Assessment should be carried out before developing SIPCOT Phase II. The State Human Rights Commission too had advised against the setting up of more polluting units in SIPCOT. However, as the scorecard demonstrates, the Tamilnadu Government has done nothing to regulate existing industries.

Either owing to political interference or other considerations, the Inspector of Factories and the Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board – which are responsible for the well-being of workers, community and the environment – have failed in their responsibilities. While the TNPCB has become more responsive than it was before, the quality of its response remains sub-standard.

The Inspector of Factories, on the other hand, is virtually non-existent. Out of five persons who were injured, three were workers who were injured in the workplace. However, not one of them has obtained the compensation legally due to them. Wherever compensation was given, it was ad-hoc payment completely unrelated to the nature and extent of disability caused by the injury. It is also not known if enquiries and actions required to be taken under the Factories Act were ever diligently conducted in these instances.

In one instance a young worker fell from a height at a construction site in Pioneer Miyagi Chemicals. The construction had no approval, and the entire unit was being constructed illegally. No action beyond stopping the construction was taken against the offending company. Constructing and operating factories without permission is standard practice in Tamilnadu. Earlier this year, Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board gave Tagros Chemicals permission to operate a factory that was constructed without permission and operated illegally for more than three years. TNPCB knew at least since August 2004 about the illegality, but did little to hold the violator accountable.

Some of the units, especially Tagros Chemicals which has expanded its capacity in an ad hoc fashion and is a major polluter, are disaster hotspots. The district administration is completely unprepared to handle any chemical emergency. Leave alone disaster relief, the Fire Department does not have the information it requires to handle a chemical fire or incident.

Under the circumstances, permitting more polluting units to set up in Cuddalore – as contained in proposals to set up a textile park, a PVC factory and a refinery complex – is bound to create more problems than jobs in the region.

### Scorecard: Details of various incidents in SIPCOT Cuddalore from January 2006 to June 2006

S No.	Date	Type of accident	Name of the unit where the accident took place or was responsible	Number of people injured	Number of people dead	Other observations	Action taken by the TNPCB and district administration
1.	1 February 2006	Effluent discharge or spill (sea)	CUSECS suspected	None	None, one animal dead	A dead dolphin washed ashore. People suspect poisoning due to SIPCOT effluents.	No report from the DEE.
2.	9 February 2006	Effluent discharge or spill (land)	GSR Chemicals	One	None	One contract worker fainted after inhaling toxic fumes from the ground while working on the foundation of the building next to GSR chemicals	Letter sent to the TNPCB. No action taken.
3.	7 March 2006	Effluent discharge or spill (river)	Arkema Peroxides	None	None	Black foam-like effluent discharged from the unit. The foam-bubbles left a black residue on the skin when touched, according to the local fishermen.	Letter about the incident sent to the TNPCB on 7 <sup>th</sup> March 2006. Officials visited the factory site only in June 2006
4.	10 March 2006	Accident outside SIPCOT.	Workshop in Old town near SIPCOT Cuddalore.	None	One	An explosion in an acid tanker undergoing welding work at a workshop in Cuddalore Old Town killed a driver's assistant. The tanker was returning after supplying chemicals to a factory in Pondicherry from Shasun Chemicals in SIPCOT. The tanker was taken to a workshop to weld a leak when it exploded killing the cleaner (drivers assistant) atop the truck on the spot.	The DEE of the PCB reportedly investigated the incident though no reports were made public.
5.	10 March 2006	Industrial accident	Loyal Super Fabrics	One	None	A casual worker operating a steam boiler in Loyal Superfabrics was burnt on the face and arm after he was exposed to a gust of super-heated steam.	Complaint sent to TNPCB and factories inspectorate. No response received. Worker received no legal compensation.
6.	11 March 2006	Illegal Operations	Southern Pigments	None	None	Southern Pigments, a unit shut down after repeated complaints over a period of 5 months illegally began operations. The company that manufactures Calcium Chloride on contract for TANFAC resumed production using a generator.	Matter was brought to the notice of TNPCB. Production was stopped. But no action was taken against the company. In fact, the company was given permission a few months later after yet another instance of illegal operation.
7.	23 April 2006	Effluent discharge or spill (river)	Arkema Peroxides	Numbers not known	None	Fishermen reported severe skin irritation and itching after entering	Complaint sent to the TNPCB. site visit to the factory made only

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						the water behind Arkema unit.	in June 2006.
8.	23 April 2006	Gas leaks and emission in the air	Tantech Agro Chemicals	One	None	SACEM monitor fainted after inhaling noxious fumes from the Tantech unit during a regular pollution patrol.	Complaint sent to the TNPCB. No details of the action made available.
9.	2 May 2006	Violation of Supreme Court Order	Pandian Chemicals	None	None	The unit was in violation of the SC order since it did not have the display board declaring the hazardous waste generated by it.	Complaint sent to the TNPCB. No details of action made available
10.	2 May 2006	Violation of Supreme Court Order	GSR Chemicals	None	None	The unit was in violation of the SC order since it did not have the display board declaring the hazardous waste generated by it.	Complaint sent to the TNPCB. No details of action made available.
11.	2 May 2006	Violation of the Supreme Court Order	Southern Pigments	None	None	The unit was in violation of the SC order since it did not have the display board declaring the hazardous waste generated by it.	Complaint sent to the TNPCB. No details of action made available.
12.	4 May 2006	Effluent discharge or spill (river)	Arkema Peroxides	None	None	Fishermen continue to complain about the black foam-like effluent discharged into the river by Arkema Peroxide. Skin contact causes serious skin ailments.	Complaint sent to the TNPCB. Site visit to the factory made only in June 2006
13.	4 May 2006	Gas leaks and emissions in the air	TANFAC, Tagros Chemicals, Tantech Agro Chemicals, SPIC Pharma.	None	None	Heavy emission from these units reported during the night along with unusually intense odors.	Reported to TNPCB through phone immediately. No action unknown.
14.	20 May 2006	Industrial accident (accident in abandoned unit)	Coromandel Indag.	One	None	A fire in an abandoned unit – Coromandel Indag factory -- emitted noxious fumes rendering a resident in the nearby area unconscious. The thick white smoke from the fire even reached the Cuddalore Old Town about 3 km away.	Reported to TNPCB. Arrived after the fire was put out several hours later. An air sample was taken by SACEM and the results revealed the presence of 10 toxic chemicals in the fumes. No details available as to what action is being taken to make abandoned or closed facilities safe.
15.	28 May 2006	Industrial accident	Pioneer Miyagi	One	None	One worker sustained a severe head injury and fractured both hands after falling from the third floor of an illegal construction within Pioneer Miyagi Chemicals.	Matter was immediately reported to the TNPCB and the Factory Inspector. The DEE immediately visited the victim as well as the factory site to investigate into the matter. The victim has not

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							received any legally due compensation under ESI. No action taken against the company by TNPCB or Factories Inspectorate. In a few months, TNPCB will permit the illegal construction.
16.	4 June 2006	Accident outside the SIPCOT unit	Workshop at Virudhachalam road	None	One	<p>A driver of a chemical tanker died after falling into it at a workshop on Virudhachalam Road near Cuddalore SIPCOT. The tanker used to supply chemicals to factories in SIPCOT.</p> <p>Similar tanker accidents have been reported before from SIPCOT. Service stations and workshops are unaware of the hazards of handling chemical tanker lorries.</p>	No reports were sent nor investigations sought.
17.	12 June 2006	Illegal operation	Pioneer Miyagi Chemicals	None	None	An illegal pipeline was discovered by SACEM monitors and TNPCB authorities during a joint inspection of the ETP in the unit. The inspection by the TNPCB officials was due to numerous complaints of illegal effluent discharge from the unit.	A verbal warning was given to the unit by TNPCB. No further action was taken. This is the second time that Pioneer has put up an illegal outlet.
18.	12 June 2006	Disease related to industrial work	CUSECS	None	One	One CUSECS worker succumbed to leukemia a year after diagnosis.	Co-workers allege that the illness is due to exposure to toxic chemicals at the work place. They demanded adequate compensation for the family of the deceased worker. Since no agreement was reached, the district administration intervened and eventually SIPCOT paid Rs.1.1 lakhs as compensation to the family.
19.	12 June 2006	Effluent discharge or spill (river and land)	CUSECS III and CUSECS VI	None	None	CUSECS workers went on a flash strike demanding compensation for a deceased worker, as a result the pumping stations were left unattended which led to an effluent overflow.	The DEE at TNPCB was informed about the situation. The DEE responded immediately and operated the pump at CUSECS VI along with the AEE until alternate arrangements were

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							made. No action to clean up the effluent spill was taken.
20.	28 June 2005	Industrial accident	Arkema Peroxide	None	None	A fire broke out in the storage area of Arkema Peroxide. According to the SACEM reports the fire lasted for about 5 minutes and the flames reached up to a height of 100 feet. A cloud of black smoke was released due to the fire. The alarm from the unit alerted the monitors and the villagers.	The AEE at TNPCB was informed who visited the unit to investigate into the matter. The AEE informed the monitors over phone about the details of the incident.  No action was taken against the company for the accident. No investigation by Inspector of Factories.