

Health Problems? Don't Curse Your Fate It May Be the Poisons in the Air You Breathe

Odour = Chemicals

SIPCOT villagers experience bad odours everyday. In a fourteen-week period, SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors recorded 36 different kinds of smells – public toilet smell, sapota fruit smell, burning corpse and decaying corpse odours, nail polish smells etc. Each of these smells indicates the presence of deadly chemicals in the air. Between March and June 2004, the Community Monitors took five air samples during five separate odour incidents using a tool called the “Bucket.” The samples were taken downwind of SIPCOT industries, and sent to a laboratory in USA to estimate the presence and levels of toxic gases that may have escaped from SIPCOT industries.

What's in Your Air

The results found more than 22 toxic chemicals in the air samples. These include chemicals like chloroform, carbon tetrachloride, benzene, methylene chloride, acetonitrile, hydrogen sulphide, methyl mercaptan etc. Many of the chemicals were found at exceedingly high levels. At least 13 of these chemicals are used as raw material in SIPCOT industries.

- 18 target the respiratory system
- 17 target the eyes
- 13 chemicals target the Central Nervous System
- 8 chemicals can cause cancers
- 8 target the liver
- 6 target the heart and related systems
- 4 target the blood system
- 1 targets the reproductive system

Is There Cause for Concern?

The very presence of these chemicals outside the factories is worrying because these chemicals are not supposed to be found at all outside factories. The fact that SIPCOT residents experience chemical odours all the time indicates that these and other chemicals are present in the air that they breathe. At high levels, many of these chemicals may cause immediate symptoms like nausea, irritation of eyes or throat, and breathlessness. The more significant danger comes from inhaling these chemicals even at low levels over a long period of time. Such chronic exposure may make people more prone to illnesses by reducing the ability of the body to fight diseases. Some of the chemicals may cause fatal diseases of the liver, heart, kidneys and respiratory systems in the long run.

Who Should be Worried?

Women, children and the elderly who tend to spend all their time within SIPCOT and workers who are exposed to much higher levels inside the factory than was found in the above samples should be concerned about health effects. Children breathe in more air in relation to their body weight than do adults. Essential internal systems such as reproductive system and immune system develop only during childhood. Exposure at this stage to toxic chemicals impairs this development, and the effects of this exposure tends to manifest itself later on in life. Pregnant women too should be careful to reduce or eliminate exposure to prevent damage to the foetus.

What Can You Do?

For most people, leaving the polluted environment is not an option. At least, pregnant women and young children should try to spend as much time as possible outside SIPCOT. The only real solution is to stop the pollution. Industries can and should ensure that toxic chemicals do not enter the air that people breathe, and must also pay to undo the damage already done to people's health and the environment.

To help ensure this, you can join the SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors in demanding for:

1. a comprehensive health study
2. specialised health care facilities close to SIPCOT
3. a time-bound pollution reduction and prevention plan
4. a ban on the expansion or setting up of any new chemical industries in and around SIPCOT.

Write to the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu

Enclose this flyer and highlight the above demands by sending a postcard to:

The Chief Minister
Fort St. George
Chennai, India

If you want to help in the struggle for a clean and healthy environment, contact:

SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors
C/o FEDCOT, 27 Abdul Khader Street, Manjakuppam, Cuddalore 1
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