

YET AGAIN, POLLUTION CLOUD OVER SIPCOT

NIRUPA SAMPATH @ Cuddalore

DESPITE frequent incidents of chemical discharge through Echankadu canal in Cuddalore district, the district administration and the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) are yet to take action to prevent the contamination of water. The residents of Echankadu village again witnessed water mixed with effluent of strong odour on December 12.

According to local sources, seepage of chemical from closed industries along the banks had been polluting the canal as well as Uppanar river here for almost a decade. A villager said, "For almost a decade now, Echankadu canal is running polluted with chemical effluent - an oily discharge yellow and red in colour with strong odour. Despite several media reports and complaints with the officials of the district administration and the State Pollution Control Board, no action has been taken till date."

The sources said the canal flows by the side of a compound wall of SPIC Pharma, which remains closed. During monsoon, the canal runs polluted and drains into the Uppanar thus contaminating the river as well.

Speaking to Express, a member of SACEM (SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors) said, "After cyclones Nivar and Bueri, it was found that the water in the canal along certain stretches turned milky white and reddish in colour with strong odour. Continuous exposure to the chemical effluent and inhaling the odour



The Echankadu canal polluted with chemical effluents | EXPRESS

can cause serious damages to health."

On the cause of the seepage, the member said, "After SPIC Pharma was closed in 2011, the Madras High Court ordered to safely clear off the hazardous wastes from there. However, during the same time, it is said that the hazardous wastes were illegally buried in low-lying areas and also along the compound wall of the firm's premises. This gives a case of suspicion that these illegally dumped hazardous wastes could be the cause of the seepage of varied-coloured, strong odorous discharges in the Echankadu canal, especially during

monsoon."

Furthermore, according to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) order in November 2019, the Comprehensive Environmental Pollution Index (CEPI) score for the Cuddalore SIPCOT is 58.25, which continues to be high when compared to previous assessments meaning serious threat to the water bodies and livelihood of inland fishers.

T Arulselvam, coordinator of the SACEM, said, "Through TNIE, the incident has already been reported several times. We request a team of officials to thoroughly inspect the closed industries and check if hazardous waste and substances are stored inside, as a few years back some miscreants tried to rob methanol from a closed industry. The team should also check if chemical wastes are buried illegally. Importantly, quarterly meetings, which were being held till five years back to discuss SIPCOT-related concerns, need to be resumed by the district collector."



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A villager