

SIPCOT Cuddalore continues to be a 'slow-motion Bhopal' 11 months after MoEF Moratorium; TNPCB fails in curbing violations

Cuddalore, 3 December 2010: Commemorating the 26th year of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, members of SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitoring (SACEM) today released results of three air samples taken in July and August this year revealing presence of high levels of least 19 toxic chemicals including 6 carcinogens in the SIPCOT air. According to the report at least 12 chemicals found in the results exceeded permissible standards prescribed by US EPA Region 6. Terming the results as an indication that SIPCOT complex is another Bhopal in making, SACEM representatives demanded immediate legal action, including prosecution of company directors, for violation of any conditions.

The air sample results also gain significance as the samples have been taken during the period when the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has imposed moratorium on new industries in the area owing to severe pollution. "While the moratorium was imposed to ensure that the pollution levels in the area could be controlled and reduced, these results indicate that nothing much has changed since. The residents of SIPCOT continue to be poisoned by the polluting industries and the ineffectiveness of the the Pollution Control Board," said a representative of SACEM.

SACEM stated that while the MoEF's efforts to curb pollution by imposing the moratorium were commendable, there has been no proposal in place to execute this vision on the ground by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB). "It has been about 11 months since the moratorium and the environmental violations continue to occur and ignored by the TNPCB. Residents have filed more than 150 complaints with the Board since the moratorium was imposed in January 2010. The fact that most of the complaints were against repeat offenders indicates the failure of TNPCB in taking action. Neither the TNPCB nor the MoEF has consulted shared or published any roadmap to mitigate pollution and remediate the environment," said SACEM.

In order to meaningfully remediate and restore the environment of SIPCOT Cuddalore, SACEM has demanded community participation in developing and implementing the plans. It has also reiterated its long standing demand of a complete ban on new projects until a regional carrying capacity study of the local environment is conducted. "The recommendation by National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) for a carrying capacity study has been pending since 1998. Reports by the communities and various governmental agencies have also confirmed the serious environmental conditions in the region. An overall carrying capacity study will give an idea of the extent of damages before any concrete remediation measures can be taken," said SACEM.

The moratorium was imposed by the MoEF in January 2010 on 43 industrial clusters around the country including 4 from Tamil Nadu after they were declared 'critically polluted' based on their Comprehensive Environment Pollution Index (CEPI). The purpose of the moratorium was to initiate time-bound action plans for improving the environmental quality in these industrial clusters/ areas. While the initial order for moratorium was till August 2010, it has been extended till March 2011 due to delay in finalizing the action plans.

There are about six new polluting projects at various stages of implementation around SIPCOT Cuddalore. This includes a 6 million ton refinery of Nagarjuna Group, a ship building yard, a textile park and at least 3 coal fired thermal power plants with a total capacity of 13,320 MW. These projects are bound to have an adverse impact on the environment and the health of the residents living in the region.

For more details contact:

T. Arulselvam – SACEM – 94437 37134

Website: www.sipcotcuddalore.com