

Cement plant in a flurry of activity after pollution report; NGO fears eyewash

7 March 2011: A day after the local NGO Himparivesh released report of air samples, the locals have observed a flurry of activity at JP's Cement Grinding and Blending Unit and some of the stone crushers. The report had revealed presence of hazardous levels of heavy metals in the air around two cement units in the BBN area – one owned by JP at Bagheri and the other at village Nayagram, owned by Ambuja cements.

Darshan Singh, the Panchayat Pradhan of Bagheri Panchayat said that they observed the water sprinklers at the JP's cement plant working overtime yesterday after which the plant was shut down in an attempt to bring down the pollution levels. An air pollution sampling machine was also placed in the Bagheri village which was later removed on villagers' insistence since the polluting plant was not functioning temporarily.

Jagjit Singh Dukhia of Himparivesh sees this as an attempt to discredit the findings of the NGO's pollution related report by creating an uncontaminated atmosphere that will last only as long as the pollution sampling machine is working. “We apprehend that the Pollution Control Board would initiate a round of air sampling to disprove the findings of our study. This would be done during a period when the plants' pollution control equipment would be working. Later, the situation would come back to business as usual. It is reported that the HPPCB would be using the high volume sampling machine for testing. Balkrishan Sharma of Himparivesh says, “The board should use low volume samplers rather than high volume samplers as they are less affected by wind direction and closely reflect the level of pollution that a human lung is exposed to.”

Ajit Singh and Master Khemender Singh have asked the Pollution Control Board to undertake pollution sampling in collaboration with the local people so that samples are taken on days and from places where the incidence of pollution is higher. In absence of such a coordinated action, pollution sampling by HPPCB is likely to produce reports of doubtful nature.