

**Programme Objective Series:  
PROBES/136/2010**

# **GUIDELINES FOR IDOL IMMERSION**



**CENTRAL POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD**

**(Ministry of Environment & Forests)**

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Idol worship has been in the practice in India since ancient time. To worship God and Goddess only natural things like Milk, Curd, Ghee, Coconut, Beetal and River Water were usually used. Idols were made with clay and then coloured with natural colours like Turmeric. The religious scripts, mythology and rituals have attempted to drive the importance of preserving nature by adoring it through the centuries. Bhagavadgita (9.26) states:

***“Patram Pushpam phalam toyam, yo mey bhaktya prayachhati  
Tadaham bhakt yupahrutam asnaami prayataatmanaha”***

In present scenario, metals, ornaments, oily substances, synthetic colours, chemical are used to make polish and decorate idols for worship and when these idols are immersed our aquatic and surrounding environment get severally affected. Hence, there is urgent need to develop the guidelines for idol immersion.

Meanwhile, Public Interest Writ Petition No. “PIL / W.P.(C) No 1325/2003”, filed in the Hon’ble High Court of Mumbai to restraint immersion of idols and related matters in the water bodies and to prevent water pollution. The Hon’ble High court finally disposed of the Writ Petition with directions to Central Government.

### 1.2 Directions of the Hon’ble High Court of Mumbai

In the matter of PIL / W.P.(C) No. 1325/2003-Janhit Manch Vs. the State of Maharashtra & Ors., the Hon’ble High Court of Mumbai in its order dated 22/07/2008 has given the following directions to the Central Govt.:

***“We expect that the Central Govt. will consider laying down of guidelines for immersion of idols and would also consider related matters with regard to pollution of water bodies. Both the Union Government as well as the State Government shall consider it expeditiously because the time lost involving the pollution might prove dangerous for environment of the country in long run”.***

- 1.3 In view of the directions of the Hon’ble High Court, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) constituted a Committee, vide order No. A-22011/1/90-Mon, dated February 10, 2009, copy enclosed as Annexure A. Past initiatives taken by Central Pollution Control Board, Maharashtra State Pollution Control Board and Department of Environment, Govt. of West Bengal are placed as Annexure B.

## 1.4 Meetings/Visits of the Committee

### 1.4.1 The First meeting of the Committee was held on April 02, 2009 at CPCB, Delhi. Major outcomes of the meeting are stated below:

- (i) There is a need to separately identify places for idol immersion in the river stretch through barricaded lineage/artificial liners under the water surface to collect the idols and other “*pooja*” material. After the activity, the liners can be easily taken out and waste so generated due to idol immersion be disposed off as per prevailing guidelines at specified location.
- (ii) There is a need to explore the availability of eco-friendly colours as per requirement. SPCBs of West Bengal and Maharashtra were requested to explore the availability of eco-friendly colours.
- (iii) There is a need to emphasize on use of natural materials in “*Pooja*” as stated in the old religious scripts.
- (iv) Stream classification is required to avoid drinking water source contamination.
- (v) Mass awareness programmes are required to be initiated every year before commencement of all activities of worship and idol immersion.

### 1.4.2 Visit of Chairman, CPCB

Chairman, CPCB visited Kolkata on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2009 to have an assessment of *Ghats* used for immersion of idols and to speak to craftsmen engaged in making idols and to have their views in the matter. The salient points of discussion held with West Bengal State Pollution Board (WBSPCB) and other stakeholders subsequent to visit are as below:

- (i) It was agreed that WBSPCB will organize awareness programmes for stakeholders on availability of Lead free paints and use of natural dyes.
- (ii) On the line of 3R Principles duly mentioned in National Environment Policy (NEP)-2006, the following points were agreed for eco- friendly idols immersion:
  - *Durga Pratima* or any other idol should be made using natural materials.
  - The immersion should be permitted only in dedicated areas under the control of local authorities, Municipal bodies, Police etc.
  - Before immersion, the flowers, the leaves and the artificial ornaments should be taken off the “*Pratima*” and Municipal Bodies shall be responsible for removing the structure & waste and cleaning of the river bed within the stipulated time.

**1.4.3 The Second meeting of the committee held on December 19, 2009 at CPCB, Delhi to formulate guidelines for immersion of idols with following major outcomes :**

- (i) The action related to idol making, its *Pooja* and immersion should be in true sense of religious expression as representing Gods & Goddesses and natural essence depicted with emphasis on use of maximum natural materials in *pooja* as stated in the old religious scripts.
- (ii) All *Pooja* ingredients should be natural like *Nariyal*, *Supari*, Thread, Leaves, Flowers, Fruits, Milk, Curd, Honey, *Ghee*, *Gangajal* etc. Even use of Mango leaves can be encouraged for *Prasad* distribution in place of the metal spoon and paper plates.
- (iii) The birth story of Lord Ganesha may be provided in the background of the guidelines for Idol Immersion, in which the importance and value of each and every natural thing has been highlighted including soil and sweat especially the event where sweat was used for birth of Lord Ganesha.
- (iv) Real *Pooja* should be encouraged and the boasters (show off business or attention seekers) should be discouraged.
- (v) Idols are innovation and expression of religious scripts and Gods and Goddesses, hence should not be made from toxic materials. Even in ancient time, ingredients used in *Pooja* and making of idols were of natural origin.

## 2.0 GUIDELINES

### 2.1 General Guidelines for Idol Immersion:

- (i) Idols should be made from natural materials as described in the holy scripts. Use of traditional clay for idol making rather than baked clay, plaster of paris, etc. may be encouraged, allowed and promoted.
- (ii) Painting of Idols should be discouraged. In case idols are to be painted, water soluble and nontoxic natural dyes should be used. Use of toxic and non-biodegradable chemical dyes for painting idols should be strictly prohibited.
- (iii) Worship material like flowers, *vastras* (clothes), decorating material (made of paper and plastic) etc. should be removed before immersion of idols. Biodegradable materials should be collected separately for recycling or composting. Non-biodegradable materials should be collected separately for disposal in sanitary landfills. Clothes may be sent to local orphan house(s).

- (iv) Public should be educated on ill effects of immersion in the holy water bodies through mass awareness programme.
- (v) The 'Idol Immersion Points' shall be cordoned off and barricaded. Synthetic liner may be placed in the bottom, well in advance. The said liner shall be removed on completion of immersion ceremony so that remains of idols would be brought to the bank. Bamboo and wooden logs, if any would be reused. Clay, etc may be taken to sanitary land fill for disposal.

## 2.2 General Guidelines for Local Bodies/ Authorities:

- (i) Local bodies /District Authorities generally make efforts to identify adequate number of designated immersion spots to avoid overcrowding and also to reduce pollution load on water bodies, such spots need to be notified and public & *pooja* committees be informed of such designated sites through awareness programme preferably a month before such events of idol immersion. All the stakeholders such as River Authority, Port Authority, Water Supply Board, Irrigation Department, etc. be consulted for identification of the Immersion *Ghats*, where flow in stream is naturally available.
- (ii) A co-ordination Committee comprising Police, Non-Government Organizations, Local Authorities, SPCBs, representatives of *pooja* committees and stakeholders may be set up for guiding the public in carrying out the immersion with minimal impact on water bodies.
- (iii) At the immersion sites, burning of solid wastes, so generated comprising of used flowers, clothes, decorating materials, etc. should be prohibited.
- (iv) Within 48 hours of the immersion of idols, the left over material at idol immersion points on the banks of rivers, lakes, beaches, etc. should be collected by the local bodies for disposal as per point 2.1. (iii) above.
- (v) In case of immersion of idols in rivers and lakes, arrangement may be made for construction of temporary confined ponds with earthen bunds for the purpose of immersion of idols. After the completion of immersion, supernatant water may be allowed to flow in river, pond and lake, as the case may be, after checking for colour and turbidity. Lime may be added in temporary confined ponds.
- (vi) The *Pooja* organizers be involved in a campaign on the ill effects of the toxic components of coloring materials, not only of the idols, but also other decorating materials used during the festive season. Specific leaflets and poster for mass awareness may be prepared and the *Pooja* committees persuaded to be display such posters and distribute leaflets among worshipers.

### **2.3 Guidelines for Idol Immersion in lakes:**

In case of immersion of idols in lakes or ponds, all the flowers, leaves and artificial ornaments of idols should be removed and idols may be immersed into a corner of pond using removable synthetic liners in the bottom. Post immersion, liners may be taken out along with remains of idols and lime should be added to the pond water for settling the solids. Desludging of the pond should be undertaken afterwards.

### **2.4 Guidelines for Idol Immersion in Rivers:**

Temporary ponds having earthen bunds along river bank should be created as idol immersion spots. Removable synthetic liner may be placed well in advance in bottom of pond. The said liner along with remains of idols should be removed from the point within 48 hours of immersion of idols.

### **2.5 Guidelines for Idol Immersion in Sea:**

In case of Idol immersion in sea, immersion may be done between low tide line and high tide line (irrespective of its depth). The low-tide line and high tide lines may be identified and marked well in advance. Motor Boats with security personnel/home guards with adequate safety equipments be deployed to supervise the immersion.

## **3.0 ROLE OF STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARDS (SPCBS) & POLLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEES (PCCS)**

- (i) Concerned SPCB/PCC should conduct water quality assessment of the water body, preferably in Class-I cities (having population more than one lac), at three stages i.e. pre-immersion, during immersion and post immersion. Considering the size of water body, appropriate number of sampling locations may be determined in order to get a fairly representative assessment of water quality. For ascertaining water quality, Physico-chemical parameters such as pH, DO, BOD, COD, Conductivity, Turbidity, TDS, Total Solids and Metals (Chromium, Lead, Zinc and Copper) may be analyzed and results posted on the SPCB's website.
- (ii) SPCB/PCC shall help to local administration in preparing material for mass awareness for the purpose.

Annexure-A



Central Pollution Control Board  
'Parivesh Bhawan', East Arjun Nagar  
DELHI - 110032

No.A-22011/1/09-Mon

18<sup>th</sup> February, 2009

OFFICE ORDER

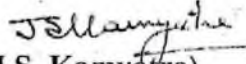
Sub:- Guidelines for Immersion of Idols

In compliance of the directions of the Hon'ble High Court of Bombay in the matter of PIL W.P.No.1325/2003 Janhit Manch Vs the State of Maharashtra & Ors., the Competent Authority in CPCB has constituted a Committee to formulate guidelines for immersion of idols in natural stream. The constitution of the Committee is as below:

- |    |   |   |                 |
|----|---|---|-----------------|
| 1) | Chairman, CPCB  | - | Chairman        |
| 2) | Member Secretary, CPCB  | - | Member          |
| 3) | Representative of Maharashtra SPCB                                | - | Member          |
| 4) | Dr. Ujjal Mukherjee, West Bengal SPCB                             | - | Member          |
| 4) | Shri Biswajit Mukherjee<br>Chief Law Officer,<br>DOE, West Bengal | - | Member          |
| 5) | Sh. R.N. Jindal, Addl Director                                    | - | Member          |
| 6) | Dr. D.D.Basu, Sr.Scientist  | - | Member Convener |

Terms of Reference of the Committee are as follows:

- To frame national guidelines for immersion of idol
- Tenure of the Committee shall be of three months
- TA/DA of official shall be borne by Govt. of India rules

  
( J.S. Kamyotra )  
Member Secretary

To  
All concerned/ As per list attached



## **Annexure - B**

### **Past Initiatives**

- CPCB studied the impact of immersion of idols during Dussehra Festival on River Hugli and published its findings in a report – COPOCS series (Ref. COPOCS/12/1997-98) wherein it was recommended that Non biodegradable materials viz. colours and paints may only be restricted and materials which are eco friendly/biodegradable may be only allowed/encouraged for making idols.
- CPCB developed guidelines for Environmental Management of Religious Places in PROBES Series (Ref. PROBES/102/2005-06).
- Maharashtra State Pollution Control Board has also developed a Code-of-Conduct for Environment Friendly celebration of Ganesh Festival.
- Department of Environment, Govt. of West Bengal constituted a Committee, vide order No. EN/906/T-IV/003/200, dated April 22, 2008, focusing on pollution from paints of colored idols in West Bengal viz-a-viz from immersion and suggested a number of recommendations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1.** A study to be commissioned to quantify the amount of toxic metals that contaminate the nature through colours used for painting the idols, clearly specifying the compositions of all the colour materials used for the specific purpose. This study should also delineate the routing of the colours, i.e., the way the colours reach the artisans from the sources, i.e., the manufacturers.
- 2.** Discontinuation of the colours known commonly by "Yellow Puree Halka", "Yellow Puree Bhari", "Red Oxide" and "Red Lead" is to be aimed at through workshops with artisan idol makers and the colour manufacturers. Target for this may be fixed as the season of idol making in year 2009, i.e., alternatives are to be set in place by August, 2009.
- 3.** All the Puja organizers are to be involved in a strong campaign on the ill effect of the toxic components of the colouring materials, not only of the idols, but also other decorating materials used during the festive season. Specific campaign materials are to be framed and the Puja organizers are to be persuaded to make display of these messages along with other demonstrable at their pandals.
- 4.** Keeping in view of the possible contamination of water bodies from lead laden paints via various sources other than immersion, it is felt that the problem should be dealt at source - i.e., within the paints themselves - in the long run. It is an admitted position as documented in the report that the use of lead has been almost fully restricted as per USEPA guideline as it is known to have highly disastrous impacts on people per se and children in particular and even an international expert committee - the Executive Committee of the International Conference on Lead Poisoning during a conference at Bangalore, India in November 1999 in its 'Recommendations on National Policy and Implementation' - had recommended in this matter sometimes back. The central government should undertake appropriate steps in this matter and state environment department is requested to take up the matter with appropriate central government agencies. The respective detailed document is annexed herewith.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS ON IMMERSIONS OF IDOLS**

On festive occasions such as Vinayaka Chaturthi and Durga Puja, it has been a tradition in our country to immerse idols in various water bodies. Such water bodies include rivers, lakes, ponds, estuaries, open coastal beaches, wells etc. Consequent pollution of such water bodies has been a matter of concern and there have been public interest litigations as well. In addition to silting, toxic chemicals used in making idols tend to leach out and pose serious problems of water pollution. Studies carried out to assess deterioration in water quality due to immersion of idols have revealed that water quality gets deterioration in respect of conductivity, bio-chemical oxygen demand and concentration of heavy metals.

Based on initiatives taken by the State Pollution Control Boards such as Tamil Nadu and West Bengal to prevent pollution due to idol immersion and a studies carried out by the Central Pollution Control Board in Bangalore, Delhi and Kolkata, the following guidelines are suggested.

- (i) State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) should undertake water quality assessment preferably in Class-I cities (having population more than one lac). Water quality monitoring should be conducted at three stages -pre-immersion, during immersion and post immersion. Considering the size of water body, an appropriate number of sampling locations may be determined in order to get a fairly representative assessment of water quality. For ascertaining water quality, physico-chemical parameters such as pH, Dissolved Oxygen, Bio-chemical oxygen demand, Chemical Oxygen Demand, conductivity, turbidity, total dissolved solids, total solids and metals (cadmium, chromium, iron, nickel, lead, zinc and copper) may be analysed.
- (ii) By and large, efforts have been made by local bodies to identify adequate number of designated immersion centres to avoid overcrowding and also to reduce pollution loading on water bodies. Such places should be notified and adequate publicity arranged every year preferably a month before such festivals.
- (iii) It would be appropriate to use traditional clay for idol making rather than baked clay. Use of painted idols should be discouraged. In case painted idols are used, water soluble and non-toxic natural dyes may be used. Use of toxic and non-degradable chemical dyes should be strictly prohibited. Natural colors used in food products and permitted in Pharmaceuticals may be preferred.

- (iv) In case of idol immersion in sea, immersion may be done beyond 500 meters of low-tide line. The low-tide line may be informed well in advance. Also, proper motor boats with security personnel/ home guards may be deployed to supervise immersion.
- (v) A co-ordination committee comprising Police, Non-Government Organisations and representatives of religious groups may be set up for guiding the public in carrying out immersion with minimal adverse impacts on water bodies.
- (vi) In case of immersion of idols in rivers and lakes, arrangements may be made for construction of temporary confined ponds/bunds for the purpose of immersion of idols including disposal of material used for worship. After the completion of immersion, supernatant river water/ pond water may be disposed in river/pond/lake after checking for colour and turbidity. If necessary, treatment should also be provided prior to disposal.
- (vii) Prior to immersion, worship material like, flowers, vastras (clothes), decorating material (made of paper and plastics), etc. should be removed. Such material may be separately collected either for recycling or composting if bio-degradable or for disposal, if non bio-degradable.
- (viii) Within 24 hours of the immersion of idols, the left over material (near rivers, lakes, beaches, etc.) should be collected by the local bodies and disposed of.
- (ix) At the immersion sites, burning of solid wastes should not be allowed.
- (x) People should be encouraged to go for smaller size idols.
- (xi) Through media people should be educated about the ill effects of such activities on holy water bodies & encouraged to go for "kar-sewa" in order to minimize, the adverse effects.