

NGT Demands Accountability from Tobacco Firms Over Plastic Waste Violations



The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has initiated legal action against several tobacco manufacturers, seeking their responses regarding alleged widespread non-compliance with India's Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016. The judicial bench, led by Justice Prakash Shrivastava and Expert Member Dr. A. Senthil Vel, issued notices on Sunday, July 27, 2025, to various authorities and manufacturers following a plea from The Citizens Foundation. This action highlights ongoing concerns about the environmental impact of plastic packaging in the tobacco sector.

The petition asserts that manufacturers of gutkha, pan masala, and other tobacco products are still utilizing banned plastic packaging materials and failing to adhere to existing regulations. The plea specifically points to violations of Rules 4(f) and 4(i) of the 2016 Rules, which explicitly prohibit the use of plastic sachets and certain polymers in packaging these products. It also alleges a lack of compliance with the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regime, which mandates environmentally sound management of products throughout their lifecycle.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had previously issued directives on October 22, 2021, to 25 manufacturers, instructing them to cease operations unless they adopted eco-friendly packaging alternatives. These directives also required companies to submit a timeline for transitioning to sustainable materials and to pay environmental compensation with interest for any delays. However, the petitioner's counsel argued that these directives remain largely unimplemented.

According to CPCB reports, non-compliance with these rules can lead to severe penalties, including the seizure of goods, the closure of manufacturing units, and the imposition of fines ranging from ₹5,000 to ₹20,000 per ton of plastic used, with higher penalties for repeat offenses. Delayed environmental compensation payments can also incur annual interest ranging from 12% to 24%, with prolonged delays potentially leading to factory closures and criminal prosecution under Section 15(1) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Recognizing the gravity of the environmental issues raised, the NGT has scheduled the next hearing for September 26, 2025. This ongoing legal scrutiny underscores the increasing focus on corporate accountability in plastic waste management and signals a renewed push for stringent enforcement of environmental norms across industries, including the tobacco sector, to mitigate plastic pollution and promote sustainable practices.