

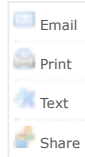
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After Muthia, Golden Corridor toxins in worms' crosshairs

Jumana Shah

Friday, February 13, 2009 9:51 IST

Ahmedabad: The earthworms are all set to have a success run across the state. After the worms cleaned up 60,000 tonnes of toxins at a site adjoining Naroda GIDC estate in Muthia village, the Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB) has consented to emulate the project in at least 10 other polluted sites in Gujarat. These sites are mainly located in the Golden Corridor of the state in South Gujarat.



Each of these sites is estimated to contain between 25,000 and one lakh metric tonnes of toxic sludge. A multi-stakeholder group, consisting of GPCB officials, NGOs working in the region and US-based NGO Blacksmith, has been formed. The group will also be funding these projects. In-charge member secretary of GPCB RG Shah says, "We are keen on using this technology on other sites in Gujarat. We are working on the details of the project."

DNA
GPCB, Blacksmith and local NGOs poised to replicate Muthia's success story in other parts of the state.

Dr Suneet Dabke, the Vadodara-based industrial waste expert who discovered this technology, said that Amlakhadi in Ankleshwar, Hema Chemicals site in Vadodara (25,000 tonnes of toxic sludge), River Mini (50,000-60,000 tonnes), Nandesari (25,000 tonnes), three sites in Vapi (30,000-35,000 tonnes), three sites in

Vadodara, and Valad (60,000-70,000 tonnes) on the outskirts of Ahmedabad are some of the shortlisted sites. The stakeholders' group visited Hema Chemicals' site on Thursday to finalise details. The worms are expected to begin work at these sites in about three months.

Blacksmith's country coordinator Promila Sharma says the institute is proud to be associated with these projects in India, and feels this low-cost solution will go a long way in clearing toxic sludge, particularly in developing countries, where methodologies and awareness to dispose toxic industrial discharge is low. "We are hopeful of using this technology in other countries too. Moreover, now that this technology has been successful, we will involve the polluters to take responsibility for the damage and help in cleaning it up," she said.

Blacksmith will approach the Asian Development Bank to fund future projects as they will be long-term projects going on for up to five years, needing more funds if it is to be carried out by professional consultants. In Muthia, the project cost about Rs15 lakh, but a larger site and a professional consultant would push up the cost to Rs 2-5 crore.



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