

Contaminated Sites Management Rules, 2025

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Contaminated Sites Management Rules, 2025: A Framework for Environmental Restoration

Context

Recently, the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** notified the **Environment Protection (Management of Contaminated Sites) Rules, 2025** under the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**. These rules aim to establish a clear process for identifying, assessing, and remediating **chemically contaminated sites** across the country.

Introduction

Contaminated sites are areas where **hazardous and other wastes** have been historically dumped, leading to the pollution of **soil, groundwater, and surface water**. Such sites pose a significant risk to **human health** and the **environment**. The newly notified rules mark the first comprehensive legal framework for managing such sites in India.

What are Contaminated Sites?

- **Definition:** As per the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**, contaminated sites are locations where hazardous and other wastes were historically disposed of.
- **Effects:** Likely to result in **soil, groundwater, and surface water contamination**, causing harm to both humans and the ecosystem.
- **Causes:**
 - Developed during periods with **no regulations** on hazardous waste management.

- In some cases, the **polluters have shut operations** or lack resources for clean-up.
 - **Types:** Landfills, waste dumps, waste storage/treatment facilities, spill-sites, and chemical waste handling/storage locations.
 - **Number of Sites:** **103 sites** identified nationwide; remediation initiated at only **7 sites**.
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Background of the Rules

- In **2010**, the Environment Ministry launched the **Capacity Building Program for Industrial Pollution Management Project** to create a **National Program for Remediation of Polluted Sites**.
 - The program had three main objectives:
 1. **Inventory creation** - Listing probable contaminated sites.
 2. **Guidance document** - Standard procedures for assessment and remediation.
 3. **Framework development** - Establishing a **legal, institutional, and financial framework**.
 - While the first two were implemented, the **legal codification** was pending until the **2025 Rules**, notified on **July 25**.
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Key Provisions of the New Rules

- **Reporting:** District administrations will prepare **half-yearly reports** on suspected contaminated sites.
- **Preliminary Assessment:** State boards or designated agencies must submit an initial assessment within **90 days**.
- **Detailed Survey:** Conducted within the next **3 months** to confirm contamination levels for **189 hazardous chemicals** listed under the **Hazardous and Other Wastes Rules, 2016**.

- **Public Notification & Restrictions:** If unsafe levels are detected, the site location will be made public and **access restricted**.
 - **Remediation Plan:** Expert bodies will prepare and recommend a clean-up strategy.
 - **Identification of Violators:** State boards have **90 days** to identify those responsible.
 - **Liability:** Responsible parties must bear the **full clean-up cost**; otherwise, the Centre and State will fund remediation.
 - **Legal Action:** Loss of life or damage due to contamination can attract criminal liability under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023)**.
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Exemptions and Gaps

- **Exemptions:** Rules do not apply to contamination from:
 - Radioactive waste
 - Mining operations
 - Marine oil pollution
 - Solid waste from dump sites
 - **Gap:** No **fixed timeline** is prescribed for restoring contaminated sites after identification.
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Addressing Chemically Contaminated Sites

- Conversion of **brownfield sites**—abandoned or underutilised land with industrial/commercial history—into safe, usable areas through **remediation and redevelopment**.
- Adoption of **cost-effective clean-up technologies**.

- Strengthening **polluter-pays principle** enforcement to ensure accountability.

Conclusion

The **Environment Protection (Management of Contaminated Sites) Rules, 2025** represent a critical step in India's environmental governance, filling a long-standing legal gap. However, effective implementation, adequate funding, technological capacity, and **strict enforcement of timelines** will be essential for restoring contaminated sites and safeguarding public health and the environment.



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