

The Bluewashing Debate

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The Bluewashing Debate: CPCB's New Category for Waste-to-Energy Plants

Context:

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has recently reclassified waste-to-energy (WTE) incineration plants — earlier labelled as a 'Red Category' (highly polluting) industry — into the 'Blue Category' as part of its 2025 guidelines.

This shift has triggered criticism from environmental experts, who argue it is an example of 'bluewashing', falsely portraying WTE incineration as an essential and environment-friendly service.

Decoding the Context:

- Until the new classification, Waste-to-Energy (WTE) incineration plants were officially listed under the 'Red Category', signifying industries with a high potential for pollution.
- The new 'Blue Category' suggests a lower environmental impact, despite the fact that WTE plants emit toxic pollutants like dioxins, furans, and particulate matter.
- Critics argue this reclassification could weaken public scrutiny and loosen environmental safeguards around such facilities.

Learning Corner: Understanding 'Bluewashing'

- Bluewashing refers to the practice of organizations making misleading claims about their adherence to ethical, social, or governance standards — often to build a positive public image or evade accountability — without genuinely changing their operational practices.
- Note: Bluewashing is conceptually related to greenwashing, which specifically involves false or exaggerated claims about environmental sustainability.

Key Mechanisms of Bluewashing:

1. Vague Claims

- Using non-specific statements like "We are committed to social justice" without offering measurable actions or transparent audits.

2. Selective Disclosure

- Promoting isolated ethical initiatives (like one eco-friendly product) while ignoring larger harmful practices (such as unfair labor conditions).

3. Symbolic Affiliations

- Joining global voluntary initiatives, such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), for image-building without adhering to its principles in practice.

4. Misleading Certifications

- Displaying unverified or self-created ethical labels to suggest compliance with high social or environmental standards.

Recent Example:

- In 2022, PepsiCo claimed to have achieved 'positive water balance' in India, implying it replenishes more water than it consumes.
- However, the India Resource Center criticized the company for excluding many of its water-intensive activities, especially in water-stressed regions like Tamil Nadu, from its calculations.
- The gap between the public claim and ground reality became a textbook case of bluewashing.



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