



At a Glance

SANITARY WASTE

Sanitary waste includes **menstrual waste (used panty liners, sanitary pads and tampons)** as well as used **condoms, syringes, diapers, cotton and bandages**, all of which **contain bodily fluids** and are categorised as **domestic hazardous waste**.

THE CRISIS

- **Manufacturers of sanitary napkins take no responsibility** for their product or its appropriate disposal.
- Sanitary waste is disposed with household waste, and **pickers often handle it with bare hands**, to the detriment of their health and well-being.
- **Burning sanitary napkins releases highly toxic dioxins**, linked to a multitude of health problems.
- There is **no system to check pollutants and gases** released by low-cost, non-monitored, mini incinerators.
- **23 million adolescent Indian girls drop out of school at puberty** because they lack adequate menstrual protection.
- Phase 1 of a menstrual health scheme for rural adolescent girls is expected to generate 90 million waste sanitary napkins in areas where there is **no system for waste disposal**.

UNSANITARY WASTE

- World's first disposable menstrual pads: 1890s
 - World's first tampons: 1920s
 - Plastic in a menstrual pad: 90%
 - Average age range for menstruation: 12–49 years
 - Average woman's lifetime days of menstruation: 3,000
 - Menstruating women in India: 355 million
 - Rural women who use unsanitised cloth: 74%
 - Menstruating women in population, who use sanitary pads: 12%
 - Monthly women using menstrual pads: 35 million (the entire Canadian population of 2017)
 - Average number of pads per woman per month: 12
 - Menstrual pads per month in India: 432 million
 - Monthly sanitary waste in India (2011): 9,000 MT
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- Menstrual waste will increase sharply as India is poised to become **the largest market for disposable sanitary napkins**.
 - In Kenya, Philippines and Yemen, mismanagement of sanitary waste is **stressing municipal budgets as it clogs sewer lines**.

CLAD IN A PAD

In a disposable menstrual hygiene pad:

- Polypropylene
- Wood pulp
- Super absorbent polymers (SAP), a plastic based gel
 - Polyethylene
 - Fragrances

THE LAWS

- The **Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000**, did not define and categorise menstrual waste.

- The **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016**:
 - define and categorise sanitary and menstrual waste for the first time;
 - define the roles, responsibilities, and manner of waste handling by producers, generators, collectors and municipalities.
- **In 2010, a scheme of the central Reproductive and Child Health Programme** was approved to provide subsidised sanitary napkins to 15 million rural adolescents.
- **In 2013, the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) guidelines** allowed incinerators in schools, women's community sanitary complexes, primary health centres, and other places in villages.
- The national **Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya** mandates at least one incinerator in girls' toilet blocks in schools.

GOING FORWARD

- **The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) clause must be implemented and monitored properly** to be effective.
- **Producers should be made responsible and incentivised** for making biodegradable, compostable products.
- **Sanitary waste should not be treated as bio-medical waste** as menstruation is a normal function, not an illness.
- **Safe biodegradable products** such as the Anandi pads or reusable ones, such as menstrual cups, should be promoted.
- Biodegradable sanitary napkins can be **composted**. For other menstrual waste, **deep burial**, as prescribed under the Biomedical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules 1998, may be adopted until a better solution is found.
- **Plastics like PVC, polyurethane and halogen bleached materials must be banned** from all menstrual products.
- **Burning** of sanitary napkins as promoted by the India government, **should be highly discouraged**.
- Ideally, **only biodegradable sanitary products should be used in UNICEF programmes**, so that their disposal is not toxic.


environmental research and action group

238, Sidhartha Enclave, New Delhi - 110014, India
T: + 91-11-46574171/72/73, F: +91-11-46574174
E: info@chintan-india.org