

Many Thermal Power Plants Violating Zero Waste Water Discharge Norms

A reply from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to an RTI query by Manthan Adhyayan Kendra has revealed that five out of 16 thermal power plants installed after 1 Jan 2017 were violating the legally binding norms of achieving zero waste water discharge. These norms, that “New plants to be installed after 1 January 2017 shall...achieve zero waste water discharged” were notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in Dec 2015.

Background

Coal based thermal power plants discharge several kinds of waste waters which can seriously contaminate local surface and ground water resources, and in turn impact the health and livelihoods of local communities. These include boiler blowdown, cooling tower blowdown, ash slurry, ash laden water etc. It is in view of the potential serious impacts that the MoEFCC notified that all plants installed after 1 Jan 2017 achieve zero waste water discharged. This implies that all the water shall be recycled and reused within the plant (or evaporated).

Even though it is almost three years since the norms were notified, neither the MoEFCC nor the CPCB nor SPCBs have put out anything in the public domain about the compliance of these norms (in spite of two separate matters related to this notification ongoing in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Supreme Court of India). Even the individual plants have not put up the compliance status on their websites. Given this, Manthan Adhyayan Kendra put a query under the Right to Information to the CPCB asking for the compliance of these norms.

CPCB Reply and Status of Compliance

The reply of CPCB dated 15 Oct 2018 shows the following details.

1. CPCB has monitored the compliance of 19 units in 16 plants which have been commissioned since 1 Jan 2017
2. This monitoring was done on 15 and 16 Nov 2017.
3. After this, CPCB has not done any monitoring, so the “latest” status of compliance available with the CPCB is one year old.
4. Out of these, five plants are clearly in violation of the norms, that is, they have not achieved zero waste water discharge. This means that these plants are discharging polluted water directly into local water bodies or environment, like the Bara TPP (Unit 3) of Prayagraj at Allahabad which is discharging waste water into the Tons river.
5. The five plants which are recorded as violating the norms and related details are as below.

Name of Plant	State	Violation Details
Nabinagar Unit 2	Bihar	Zero discharge is “proposed” (therefore, not achieved.)
Mazzafarpur Unit 4	Bihar	No discharge recycled.
Hiranmayee Energy (India Power), Haldi, Unit 1	W B.	Recycling is “proposed”
Unchahar, NTPC, Unit 6	U.P.	Partially recycled. Therefore, some waste water continues to be discharged.
Bara, Prayagraj Unit 3, Allahbad	U.P.	Discharging to Tons river

6. A sixth plant could also be in violation, but the CPCB has mis-interpreted the norms. For the Sembcorb, NCC TPP, Unit 2, Krishnapatanam, A.P., the CPCB records in its findings that this is a coastal plant and the ZLD (Zero liquid Discharge) norms are not applicable to coastal plants. However, this is wrong, as the Dec 2015 notification does not give such an exemption. It is only much later, in June 2018 that the MoEFCC issued another notification which has exempted coastal plants using sea water from the zero waste water norms. What is also not clear is that if the norms did not apply to it, then why did the CPCB inspect the plant on 15 Nov 2017?
7. Indeed, a related issue is that many of the plants inspected by the CPCB in Nov 2017 were “Shut Down” on the days of the inspection. (A total of 11 plants of the 16, many of them being shut from many days before the inspection). It is not clear then what did the CPCB inspect? At best, it could have inspected the readiness to achieve Zero wastewater discharge, and not actual performance. There is a big difference between the two. CPCB should have gone back and inspected the plants when they were operational. Also, in case of the Rattan India, Nasik plant, CPCB does not seem to have inspected it as it was shut down. But it has inspected other “shut down” plants. The reasons are not clear.
8. Another issue is that 3 plants more plants (over and above these 16) were also commissioned after 1 Jan 2017 but before the CPCB inspection on 15-16 Nov 2017. But the CPCB has not inspected these 3 plants. There is no reason given why these plants were not monitored¹.
9. The CPCB has not done any monitoring of TPPs for compliance of these norms after Nov 2017.
10. In another RTI reply, the CPCB has subsequently informed Manthan that “the compliance of environmental standards, including ...zero discharge of wastewater for any TPP is to be ensured by the respective SPCB...” and CPCB carried out the above inspection pursuant to an NGT order. In other words, the CPCB has effectively said that it is not responsible for the monitoring.
11. Unfortunately, websites of the relevant SPCBs don’t reveal any data or details of any such compliance monitoring by SPCBs. Manthan is seeking this information from SPCBs under RTI.
12. However, the violations established by CPCB inspection of Nov 2017 do not inspire optimism in the compliance status.

This is part of Manthan’s ongoing monitoring of compliance of environmental norms related to water by thermal power plants.

Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, Pune

5 Dec 2018

(Shripad Dharmadhikary, Jinda Sandbhor, Sehr Raheja)

www.manthan-india.org

manthan.shripad@gmail.com

¹ http://www.cea.nic.in/reports/monthly/broadstatus/2018/broad_status-07.pdf accessed on 5th Nov 2018. The plants are Kanti TPS St-II, Unit 4, Uchpinda TPP Unit 3, Shirpur TPP, Unit I.