

How Solid Waste Management Rules 2026 seek to tackle India's burgeoning waste problem

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Around 1.85 lakh tonnes of waste are generated daily across the country. (Amit Mehra)

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The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notified the new Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026 on Tuesday (January 27. This will come into force on April 1,

2026, replacing the SWM Rules of 2016.

The new regulation overhauls the framework for garbage management by urban and rural local bodies, and promotes reduction, reuse and at-source processing, rather than relying on large landfills and dumping yards.

Why were the new rules introduced? How are they different from the 2016 SWM Rules?

The SWM Rules, introduced a decade ago, replaced the Municipal Solid Waste Rules of 2000. It focused on segregation at source, reuse and recycling, door-to-door collection, and scientific disposal and management of municipal waste at landfills.

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While retaining these principles, the [2026 Rules](#) firmly focuses on increasing the responsibilities of bulk waste generators, discourages sending waste to landfills and poor segregation and seeks to promote a “circular economy”.

India faces a major solid waste management crisis, generating more than 620 lakh tonnes of waste every year. Every day, it generates around 1.85 lakh tonnes of waste. Of this, 1.79 lakh is collected, 1.14 lakh tonnes is processed or treated, and 39,629 tonnes is landfilled, according to the Central Pollution Control Board’s 2023-24 data. To tackle this mounting crisis, the Centre wants to shift towards a circular economy, using the following key changes.

01 Four-way segregation and waste hierarchy

For this, the government has spelt out a “waste hierarchy” and defined a “four-way” segregation of waste. The hierarchy comprises prevention, reduction, reuse, recycling, recovery and disposal as the last resort. The

segregation system expands the 'dry-waste-wet-waste' system by adding sanitary waste and special-care waste.

The sanitary waste category will include items such as sanitary towels, tampons and condoms, while special care waste will include items such as medicines, paint cans, bulbs and tube lights. Urban local bodies will have to place green bins for wet waste, blue for dry waste, and red for sanitary waste, if needed, in public toilets.

02 Bulk generators

Bulk generators are defined as entities which meet any of the following criteria – buildings with a floor area of 20,000 square metres or more; water consumption of 40,000 litres per day or more; electricity generation of 100 kg/day waste or more.

These include residential societies, malls, colleges, hotels, and large townships. This regulation applies to central and state government departments, local bodies, commercial establishments, residential societies, universities, and hostels, among others. Additionally, all gated communities and institutions with more than 5,000 sq m area and all resident welfare associations, hotels and restaurants will have to ensure segregation of waste at source and hand over recyclable material to authorised entities within a year.

03 Polluter pays principle

Under the new rules, entities will be levied an environmental compensation for non-compliance, such as not registering on a centralised portal, false reporting, forging documents and improper waste management. This principle discourages unsegregated waste disposal at landfills, and provides for imposition of higher landfill fees. Thus, sending mixed waste to landfills will be costly. The Central Pollution Control Board will prepare guidelines on this issue.

04 Tracking system

The new rules introduce a centralised online portal for tracking different stakeholders and all stages of the solid waste life cycle itself. Bulk generators, urban local bodies, waste processing and transporting agencies, waste pickers, disposal and processing facilities and large authorities such as railways, airports and Special Economic Zones, will all have to register on this centralised portal.

How does this affect bulk generators, including housing societies?

Bulk generators will face extended responsibility similar to the extended producer responsibility in place for manufacturers of electronic items and plastic products. This will apply once urban local bodies frame by-laws by March 2027 to incorporate provisions of the new rules.

Bulk generators will now be made accountable through a certification-based compliance. As a result, residential societies, colleges, large townships and so on, will have to register on the centralised portal to submit mandatory waste accounting. They will have to segregate waste under the 'four-way' stream regime and make efforts to process wet-waste at source through on-site composting or alternatives. However, if they are unable to do so, they can procure certificates from local bodies or associated waste processing facilities to show proof of compliance.³

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Annual returns must be filed by June 30 detailing waste quantity, certificates procured, and non-compliance will attract compensation. Thus, residential societies will either have to move towards on-site wet waste composting and segregation of waste, or tie up with local bodies or processing facilities. This is done to reduce the burden on landfills.

What does this mean for landfills?

India's cities are infamous for landfill mountains that have taken in mixed waste for years, contaminating and polluting the surrounding environment. The new rules intend to make landfills the last stop for garbage disposal and only for non-usable, non-recyclable and non-energy-recoverable waste material.

All urban local bodies will have to map legacy landfills and dumpsites by October 31, 2026. They will have to prepare time-bound plans to reduce the mountains of garbage through bioremediation and biomining. In bioremediation, bacteria and microbes are used to reduce waste and its smell, while usable materials are recovered in biomining.

Also, waste with calorific value of 1500 kg calories or more must be used for energy generation through refuse-derived fuel or for co-processing in cement and thermal plants, as per the new rules. Calorific value refers to the heat energy provided by a fuel such as plastic waste, agri-residue, and kitchen waste. Industries have been given targets to replace solid fuel with refuse-derived fuel, which is obtained from various waste categories, with 6% use initially, and up to 15 % after six years.

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