

'After 30 yrs, contamination still poses risks to Bhopal'

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Once again time New Delhi-based research organization Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has sounded an alarm about large-scale contamination in the soil and water of the area near closed factory of Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL).

The CSE has warned that entire focus is on 350 tonne of toxic waste but there are several sites that have contaminated ground water and it is yet not known if it has reached in radius of several kilometers in Bhopal.

The CSE had organised a round table of stakeholders during April 25-26 in New Delhi to chalk out an action plan on remediation of soil and groundwater, disposal of toxic chemical waste and remediation of plant machinery. But how much state government is sensitive to the issue was shocking to learn when CSE deputy director general Chandra Bhushan revealed

Action plan suggested for medium and long term measures

The expert group has suggested medium and long term measures for remediation and waste disposal, securing the site and SEP area by fencing and guarding to prevent access of people, stopping construction in the SEP area; and protecting annual surface water runoff from the site during monsoon. The action plan also suggested excavation and recovery of all the waste from the site; characterisation and inventurisation of the collected waste for proper treatment and disposal. Under the supervision of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and affected community, incinerable waste is to be incinerated after the stabilisation of the trial results at Pithampur. "The action plan is devised out of consensus within the expert group. It was widely agreed that this is high time to break the existing institutional logjam and the government of Madhya Pradesh should swiftly act and solve this public health concern of huge significance," Bhushan said. For the medium and long term measures of the action plan, the expert group has a consensus on groundwater contamination assessment through detailed field investigation and lab analysis to develop a remediation plan. Possibility of hydraulic containment is to be explored as an interim containment measure. "India is capable of such kind of remediation," he said.

here, "Except for state authorities everyone represented in the round-table." He said the contamination is posing immense threat to lives of residents of various localities around the area. The expert group, Bhushan said also con-

cluded that 350 tonne of toxic waste stored in premises is a small part of the total waste that is still lying at various sites. "It would take almost five years to decontaminate the soil and groundwater," he said.

However, in absence of

proper calculation on funding that is required for remediation and decontamination of ground water, the people have to pin their hopes on government authorities, he added.

Releasing action plan for remedial of toxic wastes lying in and outside the factory premise Bhushan said, "Each study conducted during 2009 to 2013 ends with a conclusion that contamination is at large level but it would take approximately five years that too if governments work in aggressive manner."

During its process of producing Carbamate pesticide and organochlorine formulations between 1969 and 1984, UCIL had dumped toxic wastes at several locations inside the plant and in a solar evaporation pond (SEP) outside factory premises.

"This waste has been a continuous source of soil and groundwater contamination. It is posing serious risk to public health particularly residents in the proximity of the factory," Bhushan who is also head of the CSE's lab said.