

The Mass Crisis of Masks!



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The World today is gripped with the fear of Covid 19; proper usage and disposal of masks has become utmost important in preventing the spread of Noval Corona Virus. Masks are considered essential protection against Covid-19. While the atmosphere of Earth seems to be healing, Humans are trapped in masks! The demand of masks is overwhelming and increasingly so as the infection makes its way around the world. But have we ever wondered where the masks we used and thrown away casually, ends up?

In a country like India, where we majorly do not follow the civic sense of segregating our waste, the discarded masks often end up being mixed with other household wastes, be it the Organic or the Recyclables. The organic waste is often devoured by animals. Although it is not scientifically established but the animals who come in contact with infected masks poses chances of acting as the carrier of the Virus. On the other hand, the garbage collectors, whose portion of income is generated from the recyclables you discard, are in high risk of contamination if infected masks are mixed with the recyclables. There are dangers that the coronavirus will spread to garbage collectors and others if waste that may carry the infection is not handled properly. The infection can live for hours and could be transferred to the person who touches it and then their face. The mixed waste is also hard for authorities to first separate them and then dispose them. Adding to that, we also lack sufficient number of incinerators in our cities.

Our lack of trash etiquette will not only heighten the risk of the infection spreading, but also adversely impact the environment by increasing pollution of soil and water. Environmental groups have found thousands of used masks littering around which is threatening to marine life and wildlife habitats. Single-use masks are made of plastic and if not disposed of properly, the plastics will breakdown into micro-plastics over time. These micro-plastics can end up in the water we drink, as well as the water that is home to many animals.

It is an undeniable fact that masks and other protective gears are essential for health and social care workers. But the rest of the population can develop a habit of rationalizing the use of masks and taking care of sterilizing the used masks and discard it with precautions. While removing the mask, remove it from the back without touching the front, fold it and soak it in disinfectant liquid for some time. Wrap the mask in a tissue paper or polythene bag and discard it separately, so that the waste collectors do not come into direct contact with them.

One step towards rational use of mask is switching to cloth mask that are reusable (only applicable if you are not an infected person or medical staff treating a patient). Most face masks are disposable and are for one-time use only, but cloth masks can be re-used after properly washing, disinfection and drying.

On an ending note, if we truly desire to be sanitary and deal properly with this pandemic, we have to be responsible with the waste we generate and not dispose them casually. We are in this together and every small step counts!

Article by Amrita Baruah

Earthful Foundation

operations@earthful.org

AT News

Assam Times Staff. editor@assamtimes.org

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