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Carcinogen in Gzb water 800 times over limit: Study

Hexavalent Chromium Content High In Industrial Area

Lalit Kumar | TNN

Ghaziabad: No more do Ghaziabad residents have the luxury of dismissing the threat of pollution as another ill of urban existence that can be shrugged away.

Based on a study commissioned by the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) last year, its Ghaziabad chief Paras Nath has revealed that the amount of carcinogenic hexavalent chromium in the groundwater—over several square kilometres, including Ghaziabad's geographical centre, particularly areas adjoining Meerut Road industrial area and Lohianagar — is 40 mg per litre, 800 times above WHO's maximum permissible limit of 0.05 mg per litre.

Not that the figures have had much effect on the district administration, which, so far, has made no concrete attempt to study the health effects of the heavy metal, that so many residents consume through the groundwater in this area. The administration has so far only surveyed areas where the water has turned yellow, indicating extreme toxicity, without bothering to study nearby areas where the water might not have changed colour but could still be harmful. Its modest efforts at cleaning up the water over the past decade, by converting the toxic hexavalent chromium in the water to its relatively safer trivalent form, have not borne any significant results.

Quizzed about the implications of the pollution, Nath said, "An industrial unit that was initially identified as polluting the groundwater with the carcinogen through its effluents, claims it is currently engaged in cleaning up the groundwater. So far, the result of their effort has not been anything to speak about. But I'll look into this soon."

Nath had no answer to the allegation made by Neeraj Chowdhary, an engineer and social activist from Lohianagar, the colony most affected by the contamination, that "many brands selling water purifiers have stopped accepting annual service contracts for addresses in and around Lohianagar, as filters get clogged by chromium and other toxic deposits far too quickly". Chowdhary had also claimed, "Even the water supplied by Ghaziabad Nagar Nigam (GNN) clogs our filters." In his defence, Nath said, "We have asked the government to call an IIT or another specialist to probe the issue of chromium in the groundwater, and suggest ways in which the menace can be handled."

GNN commissioner R K Singh was not reachable. But district magistrate Vimal Kumar Sharma said, "My inquiries have revealed that GNN water supply is erratic and inadequate. This forces people to access and drink groundwater. I have instructed GNN to improve the situation immediately and ensure sufficient supply of proper drinking water. Also, I request NGOs or volunteer doctors to survey the affected areas for cancer-related cases."

Oncologist Dr Sudhir Agarwal said, "Ingestion of chromium is usually linked to intestinal, throat and oral cavity cancer."

HOW SAFE IS YOUR TAPWATER?

- High chromium levels have been found in various areas of the city, particularly the Meerut Road industrial area and Lohianagar
- City has also seen a sharp fall in the water table, now at 170 feet in trans-Hindon areas
- Residents have to depend on groundwater as civic water supply is insufficient

UPPCB study has confirmed presence of 40mg carcinogenic hexavalent chromium/ litre of groundwater

It is 800 times above WHO's maximum permissible limit of 0.05 mg/litre

"We have asked the government to call an IIT or another specialist to probe the presence of chromium in groundwater, and suggest ways to tackle the menace

PARAS NATH | Ghaziabad pollution chief

"Water purifier firms have stopped accepting annual service contracts for addresses in and around Lohia Nagar, as filters get clogged by chromium and other toxic deposits too quickly

NEERAJ CHOWDHARY | Engineer and social activist

"GNN water supply is erratic and inadequate, and forces people to drink groundwater. I have asked the corporation to ensure sufficient supply of proper drinking water

VIMAL KUMAR SHARMA | DM