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Retailers using plastic likely to lose licences

NO IMMEDIATE ACTION? State environment minister says government may give more time to manufacturers and shopkeepers to dispose of their existing stock

MUMBAI: A day after the state government issued a notification barring use of plastic, it has announced that retailers and shopkeepers may lose their licence if found using, storing or selling banned items.

During licence renewal, shopkeepers will have to give an undertaking in the form of affidavits that they won't use, sell and stock plastic. Meanwhile, retailers in the city demanded that bags and packages used to maintain the quality and freshness of cereals, pulses, fruits and breads not be banned as they are used to protect the material.

Apart from the government, traders and shopkeepers will have a key responsibility in ensuring implementation, said environment minister Ramdas Kadam said. "We have given adequate time of three months to traders and manufacturers to dispose of stock by issuing a notification in January," he said.

Facing uproar from manufacturers, the state government may extend the deadline for plastic disposal. Civic authorities will certify if a manufacturer has disposed of the stock within a stipulated time. "Though they are expected to dispose it in a month, additional time will be given after deliberation by the high power committee and chief minister Devendra Fadnavis," said Kadam. The government has clarified that according to the rules stakeholders have to set up a mechanism to recycle water bottles and milk bags.

Manufacturing associations have slammed the government for allowing plastic containers of potato chips and tetrapacks for eatables manufactured by multinational companies. "Multi-layered plastic bags used to package potato chips is not banned. Similarly, bags for pulses and cereals sold by multinationals have been excluded from the ban. This is discriminatory and harmful to small businesses," said Ravi Jasnani, president of Maharashtra Plastic Manufacturers Association.

The Federation of Retail Traders Welfare Association (FRTWA), while welcoming the ban, has demanded to exclude bags that are an integral part of packaging from the ban. Federation's president Viren Shah, in a letter to the chief minister, said, "Bags used to maintain the quality and freshness of cereals, pulses, fruits, breads should not be banned as they are used to protect the material."

Ramdas Kadam said primary packaging has not been banned. The fear of rise in unemployment or loss of business was blown out of proportion as 80% of the plastic consumed in Maharashtra is manufactured in other states, he said. "Three months ago, we had given a notice to these manufacturers to switch to other business and dispose of their stock," he said.

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