

BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL

SOUTHER ZONE, CHENNAI

In

Original Application No.43 of 2017(SZ)

In the matter of:-

Suo Moto The Tribunal on its own motion on the implementation
of the Biomedical Waste Management Rules,2016 in Kerala

with

The State of Kerala, represented by it's the Chief Secretary

Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala &Ors.

: Respondent(s)

STATEMENT FILED BY THE 6TH RESPONDENT IMAGE PURSUANT TO

THE DIRECTION DATED 25.01.2022 ISSUED BY THIS HON'BLE TRIBUNAL

1. I am the Secretary of IMAGE, 6th respondent in the O.A. I have gone through the order dated 25.01.2022 issued by this Hon'ble Tribunal. The statement is filed in compliance with the direction contained in para No.5 the said order, directing the IMAG to file "an independent statement regarding the fire incident occurred in their biomedical waste disposal facility and also the remedial measures taken by them to avoid such incidents recurring in future."
2. It is true that a fire incident occurred in IMAGE premises on 16.01.2022. On the said day IMAGE plant was working as usual. There were total 137 workers inside the plant on that day. A fire accident happened in the plant at around 10.00 a.m. on that date. The fire started in the scrap sorting-cum-bottle processing shed behind Plant No.III, which later spread to the Barcode Processing-cum-Waste Unloading area situated on the right side of the Bottle Processing-cum-Scrap Sorting Shed. In the Scrap Sorting Shed both partially treated and untreated waste along with some processed scrap were kept.



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3. At around 9.30 a.m. one of the Supervisors working in the bottle processing shed saw some smoke arising from the partially processed scrap kept behind the bottle processing shed and immediately alerted the maintenance team, the plant supervisor Shri Mohandas and other labourers working inside the plant. Immediately the labourers and maintenance team reached near the bottle processing shed and started to extinguish the fire. They did this by pumping water initially with hose pipe and later by utilizing the Fire Hydrant System installed at various locations near the fire originated area.
4. The heavy wind in the plant area has led the fire to spread at a rapid pace all through the processed scrap and dry shrubs nearby the Barcode Processing yard, where partially treated waste, processed scrap and untreated waste were stored temporarily. This pre-engineered building structure with around 16500 sq.ft. area was built in the year 2018-19 for the purpose of barcode processing of the received waste and also for storage of the processed scrap.
5. At around 10.30 a.m. the Plant-in-charge alerted the Kanjikode Fire Station over the telephone. By 11.30 a.m. the officials from Kanjikode Fire Station along with one Fire Engine reached the plant. Due to the railway gate closed on their way little delay happened at their arrival at the plant. The fire officials started extinguishing the fire with the help of available workers in the plant. By the time the barcode yard building also started getting fire. The fire brigade arranged 5 more fire engines from the nearby Fire Stations. Around 80 professional fire fighting staff along with the dedicated labourers in the premises continued their efforts till the fire came under complete control, thus preventing the fire being spread to other adjacent buildings. In addition to the water in the fire fighting engines additional continuous supply of water was ensured from the rain water harvesting pond at the plant.
6. The Fire and Rescue Department officials were at the site continuously for three days monitoring the fire affected area. The District PCB Officials also reached the plant immediately and placed Ambient Air Quality Monitoring System for ambient air monitoring purpose. Though it took some time and effort to bring the fire under control there was no human casualty and no machinery or equipment of the unit has been damaged due to the fire. Many officials and socio-political leaders including the M.P. and M.L.A. visited the plant on the day of the fire. As per the request of the IMAGE Chairman and Secretary, Past Chairman Dr. C.K. Chandrasekhan, Vice Chairman, Dr.P.Rajagopalan Nair, Joint Secretary Dr. Velayudhan and District representative Dr. Rasitha Gireesh reached the plant by around 12.00 Noon and co-ordinated the fire fighting activities. By evening the present Chairman of IMAGE Dr. Abraham Varghese, IMA State President Dr. Samuel Koshy and IMAGE Secretary Dr. Sharfudheen had reached the plant from various distant places in the State.



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7. On the next day i.e. 17.01.2022 two units of fire engines along with 15 persons from the Fire Rescue department stayed in the plant whole day, supported by the safety team of IMAGE. Official inspection by the Forest Department, Fire Department and Pollution Control Board took place on that date. As per the directions from the Fire Department the waste from the sides of the fire affected building were started removing so as to prevent the fire being spread to the adjacent areas. On 18.01.2022 inspections by the officials of KSPCB along with the Executive Engineer, Regional Office, PCB took place. They inquired about various details and informed about the testing of ambient air quality by special monitoring team posted by PCB. On 18th also two units of fire engines along with 15 employees from the Fire and Rescue Department stayed in the plant whole day. On 19.01.2022 inspection by the Executive Engineer of KSPCB along with the officials of the Regional Office, PCB took place. Special air quality monitoring team reached the plant and installed the Ambient Air Quality Monitoring device at various sites at the IMAGE plant, Guest House and at houses at a distance from the plant.
8. On 19th a formal intimation about the fire incident was given to the Kasaba Police Station by the IMAGE authorities. On that day the Secretary of District Panchayath and some party leaders visited the plant. On the next day i.e. on 21.01.2022 a Surveyor deputed by the Insurance Company inspected the plant and took notes of the incident. Two units of fire engines were there in the premises on that day also. The District Forest Officer along with a team of Range Officers visited and inspected the fire affected areas of the plant. The inspection by the PCB officials took place at intervals on subsequent days also. It is respectfully submitted that despite the fact that it took a few days to control the fire completely, the functioning of the IMAGE plant has not been obstructed or interrupted for even a single day. The fire has not affected any machinery or equipment of the plant nor has damaged or destroyed any of the files, registers or records maintained in the plant. It is further submitted that as per the valuation/assessment as on today the fire has not caused any lasting damage to the surroundings or to the atmosphere or has caused any air or water pollution. If at all any damage has occurred it is only temporary as in the case of any other fire incident, which would be cured in no time.
9. Petitioner is given to understand that Police investigation is still going on as to the cause of the fire. IMAGE also is making their own efforts to find out the reason and source of the fire. Since the project site is surrounded on one side by natural forests, initially it was suspected that the fire must have emanated from the forest area and spread to the plant site. It was only a suspicion which had to be ruled out as IMAGE authorities could not gather any evidence or arrive at any conclusion in that regard. But one thing is certain that the possibility for the fire being caused by the negligence of the plant staff or the IMAGE authorities is far remote, as IMAGE has taken all care and caution against such incidents, and this is the first ever fire incident in the history of the IMAGE plant since its inception in 2003. It is respectfully submitted that IMAGE cannot be found fault with if they suspect any mischief or sabotage behind the incident at this time by some vested interests since, of



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late, IMAGE has business rivals in the field, and there are lobbies which want to diminish the public reputation of IMAGE as the most effective and useful Common Biomedical Waste Treatment Facility (CBWTF) in the State. Therefore, there are now people who may want to create damaging impression about the functioning of IMAGE, that IMAGE has piled up backlog of untreated waste in their premises and the fire has emanated from this piled up waste. There may also be efforts to give an impression that the machineries and equipments of IMAGE have been damaged by the fire incident and hence IMAGE may not be able to handle and process the present quantity of biomedical waste which they are treating now, and therefore it may be shared with some other CBWTF in the State.

10. It is respectfully submitted that IMAGE has been absolutely serious and careful about the safety and security of its plant and premises, and they have taken all precautions and safeguards against such accidents, and this is precisely why no such incident has taken place in its premises during its existence from 2003 onwards. Hence it is respectfully submitted that even if any suspicion has been created from any corner putting the blame for the fire incident on the IMAGE it is completely misguided, unwarranted and unfortunate. With great respect we submit that IMAGE is not at all responsible for the fire incident, and assure this Hon'ble Tribunal that IMAGE will continue to have round the clock vigil and security for its plant and premises and also will discharge our moral, legal and corporate responsibility to the society and the surrounding public by protecting the environment to the best of their abilities. It is prayed that this statement may kindly be accepted.

Dated this the 15th day of February, 2022.



Secretary, IMAGE IMA

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