

The Times of India, Mumbai, 10 Sep 2008

Chembur residents turn idols to brick

Sukhada Tatke | TNN

Mumbai: Even while the BMC is deliberating over what to do with the remains of Plaster of Paris (POP) idols after their immersion in artificial lakes, residents of Chembur's Pestom Sagar have adopted an eco-friendly route to do just that.

After conducting several experiments on how to dispose of the remnants without causing harm to the environment, these residents have zeroed in on making bricks out of them. They are recovering remnants of the idols after immersion, crushing them, mixing them with fibre, adding fresh POP to the mixture and putting the result in moulds. The result: a white brick within minutes.

Incidentally, the civic body has been toying with the idea for a long time, spurned on by encouragement from experts at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). However, the BMC hasn't implemented the scheme yet, saying it is awaiting final inputs from IIT.

Members of the Pestom Sagar Citizens' Forum (PSCF)—who were also the first ones in the city to drill artificial wells for immersion—said they always wanted to carry out the immersion in an environmentally friendly manner but the aftermath posed a stumbling block. "At the end of the immersions, we were forced to dump the leftovers in the sea. Then we realised there was no point to the exercise. We tried several things like keeping it in water for long, but the POP idols just didn't disintegrate," said PSCF joint secretary Dr Vijay Sangole. "Then we tried this experiment and it worked. We have already made 25 bricks."

Idols made of POP and coated with chemical dyes are known to have a corrosive effect on the ecosystem when disposed of without checks. Its sulphate content is also harmful for waterbodies.

As concern spreads over the ecological hazards of idol immersion, and communities are banding together to staunch the pollution of water bodies during Ganesh Chaturthi, scientists warn that the brick-making would lose meaning if not carried



Sanjay Hadkar

CONCRETE WAY TO SAVE THE GREENS: Residents of Pestom Sagar has been recovering remnants of POP idols and processing the material to make bricks

out in a scientific manner. "It is a long process. The bricks should be of standard sizes and quality. The additives need to be proportionate. Only then can they be used for construction," said professor Shyam Asolekar, head of the CESE, who is also consulting the BMC on the issue. "We have approached the pollution control board and they are helping us locate a company that will make these bricks. By next year, we should be ready with a solution."

Residents feel that the bricks can be used for several reasons as they still "possess a sacred significance". "Even if a few bricks are used by builders in a new construction, it can have a symbolic value," said committee member Prakash Barshikar.

sukhada.tatke@timesgroup.com