

Students talk ecology

Suravajhala¹ rightly points to the need for a student congress to promote high-quality research in India. An effort was launched in August 2008 to create opportunities for better networking and shared learning among the community of ecology students. Ecology is a vast discipline, and its various facets are studied across the country, all the way from sophisticated laboratories in large universities to small NGOs in little towns. SMEECS '08

(Student's Meet in Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Science) was organized by student volunteers as an informal platform for student researchers from institutions in and around Bangalore to present and discuss their work with contemporaries. From this year onwards, students from all over India will be invited to participate in this meet, and to join an on-line forum of student ecologists working in India. This year's event,

rechristened YETI (Young Ecologists Talk and Interact), will be announced shortly.

For more information, please write to: meet.yeti@gmail.com

1. Suravajhala, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2009, **96**, 325.

SMEECS '08 ORGANIZERS

Green India

The sheer magnitude of ecological challenges like global warming and desertification of cultivable land necessitate extraordinary measures. Within the premise of national borders, restoration of the green cover to the pre-independence level may be the only option. Use of electricity/fossil fuel a priori means that the consumer is polluting the environment. If we accept this argument, the onus of undoing the effects of pollution squarely rest on the consumer. Since the consumer is transforming certain amount of fixed carbon into the atmospheric CO₂, he should take steps to convert the equivalent gas emissions back into fixed carbon. In practice this will mean plantation of trees in proportion to the energy consumed, and this activity should be made mandatory by adopting legislation on the following lines.

Here is a workable proposition. All the industries with an annual turnover of say Rs 10 million or more should be registered under the legislation called the GREEN act. The electricity consumption of each registered industry over a period of 12 months should be recorded. Presuming that a given industry consumes x units of electricity, it must plant y number of trees over the equivalent period of time. An independent agency called GREEN consultants may be empowered

to work out the ratio of $x : y$. Factors like the growth rate of the plants, geographical and physical nature of the terrain selected for plantation, irrigation facility, etc. may be weighed while deciding the proportion. The GREEN consultants may also constitute the norms for the selection of trees, site for plantation, methods to nurture them and other logistics.

For plantation, the industry will be free to use its own land. Or else, government land, anywhere in the Union of India, may be made available. While the cultivated plants will remain a property of the government, the industry will be entitled for credits determined by yet another independent agency called the GREEN audit. It will monitor the site, age, health and growth of each plant, evaluate the overall plantation activity, quantify the GREEN production and allot proportionate credits. Depending on the credits, the industry will be entitled to claim tax rebates. The legislation should ensure generous tax rebates so as to make the whole effort worth while. Another positive outcome of this exercise would be the job opportunities to the young science graduates who can serve as GREEN auditors. In due course of time, the GREEN auditors can resort to satellite images to monitor the status of plantation on a given piece of land.

The industries that cannot spare the manpower to pursue plantation activity, may outsource it to rural farmers, keep a record of the plantation activity, and claim tax rebate. This will provide a platform for direct interaction between the farmer and the industry, and also the business opportunities to the farmer at his doorsteps.

Over a period of time, the entire exercise will translate into reforestation, which in turn will generate enormous carbon emission reduction units for India. The revenue thus generated may further be deployed for reforestation. The entire exercise will initially cost heavily to the exchequer. However, the expenses can be recovered by imposing a GREEN cess on the consumers.

It is hoped that the strategy will help restore the Green cover and at least partly counter the consequences of burning the fossil fuel.

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