

Oil companies will not blend MMT in petrol

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NEW DELHI: Delhi will not have to bear toxic effects of a petrol additive, methyl cyclopentadienyl manganese tricarbonyl (MMT), being planned by oil companies for blending in petrol. Nor will it be used in most parts of India. Following a proactive move by Central oil minister Mani Shankar Aiyer, the oil PSUs took a decision last week to stop blending the manganese-based octane enhancer in petrol, which had just began in Mathura and Panipath refineries.

At present, the MMT is being used in some small units in North East and Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL). Even there, its use will come to an end, assured Aiyer in a letter to NGO, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) on Tuesday.

The minister wrote, "I have been informed that except for NRL, which uses marginal quantities of MMT as a trimming agent for marginal increase in the octane number of motor spirit, other public sector oil refineries are not using MMT any more."

The NRL too will stop using the MMT by March 2006 when their new facilities for enhancing "motor spirit" will be commissioned.

It all started about three months back when the NGO got a tip-off from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and raised alarm against its being considered by the oil PSUs for blending in petrol as octane enhancer.

To stop the blended petrol's entry in the Capital, the CSE alerted the state environment minister Raj Kumar Chauhan and his secretary Naini Jayaseelan, who promptly took the issue with PSUs and the Central oil minister. Similar feedback was also received by the Delhi government from Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and its local wing, Delhi Pollution Control Board (DPCB).

Lauding the CSE move of sensitising authorities about the impending damage to citizens' health, a CPCB scientist said on condition of anonymity, "It's a classic example of media sensitising the millions. MMT forms manganese particles when burnt as a petrol additive. The chemical is potentially neurotoxic. Manganese deposits can also damage the emission control systems and catalytic converters in vehicles."

MMT creates serious neuro-toxic effects. The symptoms are just like those in Parkinson's disease. The CSE says, the global automobile industry players like Honda and Ford have studied the damaging impacts of manganese deposits on emission control components in petrol-driven vehicles. A US-based automobile manufacturers' alliance also conducted studies on MMT and found its toxic properties injurious to humans and animals. "They are worried as they have to meet very stringent low emission standard in their vehicles in the US now," said a CSE chief deputy at Research and Advocay, Anumita Roychoudhury.