



PLASTIC NIRIKSHAN AVAM JAGRUKTA RATH

A REPORT ON
THE THREE PLASTIC RATHS
DEPLOYED ALONG THE ROUTES OF
RUDRAPRAYAG, UTTARKASHI, AND RISHIKESH
FOR THE ONGOING
CHAR DHAM YATRA 2023



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Acknowledgements

The Uttarakhand Pollution Control Board (UKPCB) profusely thanks the three Plastic Rath teams (twelve members in all) for their earnest and hard work in bringing the issue and challenges of Solid Waste Management (SWM) and Single Use Plastic (SUP) to light. While doing that, they also created awareness about the same on the Char Dham route in Uttarakhand.

UKPCB also thanks the state government's assistance by agreeing to this important project taking off and providing crucial logistics and infrastructure assistance.

Our organisation also expresses gratitude to our knowledge partner Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation, which had its members as part of the team, reported on the progress on a weekly basis, and also made this report.

Last but not the least, we thank the countless local citizens and pilgrims who are doing their bit to ensure that the Char Dham Yatra becomes even better by managing their own waste and minimising the use of plastic.

Introduction

The Char Dham route of Uttarakhand has been popular for pilgrims all over India for centuries. With time, the rate of those seeking to find peace and solace in the four holy sites of Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath has increased manifold in the past few years.

Government figures say that no less than 45 lakh pilgrims went for Char Dham Yatra in 2022. There are indications that the number of pilgrims coming to Uttarakhand for the Char Dham Yatra of 2023 will far exceed this number.

While the income generation that is associated with increased tourism is welcome from an economic standpoint, tourism leads to increased spikes, particularly in plastic waste generation. With the government's focus on increasing amenities and making all-weather roads, tourist inflows have increased substantially. All this exerts enormous pressure since the usage of plastic packaged products increases significantly with more tourists and pilgrims.

Water, juice and soft drink plastic bottles, biscuit wrappers, single-use plastic cutlery, multi-layer plastic packets, plastic straws, carry bags, packaging material are just some of the forms of plastic that is generated on the route.

The mountain terrain and pressures due to a massive floating population makes the issue of plastic waste management even more complex and challenging. Such challenges of plastic waste generation due to increased pilgrimage and tourism are extremely relevant not only for Uttarakhand but for all Himalayan states in the country.



While the Uttarakhand government is working on a war footing to build the waste management infrastructure, it is also aiming at increasing awareness about plastic waste management so that the common public, pilgrims and tourists feel responsible for a clean and plastic-free environment and do their bit.

Moreover, in an extremely eco-sensitive zone, the horde of pilgrims walking up and down the narrow path for the four holy sites, it becomes crucial that the people take responsibility for the plastic waste they generate and dispose of.

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UKPCB's Commitment to Combat Plastic Waste

The Uttarakhand Pollution Control Board is working tirelessly in the direction of addressing the challenge of waste management, especially plastic waste.

Considering the increasing number of people visiting the four holy sites of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri, processes need to be put in place to tackle the waste management challenge along the routes.

Apart from raising awareness among the local public, pilgrims and ULBs, there is a need to keep track of areas for improvement and address immediate challenges, such as trash dumped on the route, lack of awareness among pilgrims, paucity of dustbins, etc.

Plastic Nirikshan Avam Jagrukta Rath is a monitoring and awareness action plan aimed at ironing out the above issues and more so that not only does the current yatra stay one without trash dumping and SUP usage, but so that the coming yatras can build upon this practice and make it even more efficient.



Journey so far

The work summary is from May 25, 2023 to June 24, 2023. It is for a period of 5 weeks:

- 1) 3 days (May 25-May 27)
- 2) 6 days (May 29-June 3)
- 3) 6 days (June 5-June 10)
- 4) 7 days (June 12-June 18)
- 5) 6 days (June 19-June 24)

- The three Plastic Rathes have covered a distance of 6,186 km in 28 days (Average 221 km a day for 3 raths, Avg 74 km a day for each Rath)
- The three Plastic Rathes have been to 381 different areas on the Char Dham route.
- Teams conducted regular awareness sessions with community members in public places and with local authorities in their work areas.
- About 11,300 awareness posters and stickers were distributed by the three Plastic Rathes during the above 5-week period.
- Photos and videos were sent by all Plastic Rathes on a regular basis.
- Twelve notices were issued to respective local authorities based on photographic evidence from the three Plastic Rathes.



Team Rudraprayag

- Covered 2,629 km
- Listed 103 areas
- Four notices issued to Karanprayag, Rudraprayag, Gauchar and Augustmuni ULBs

Note: Rudraprayag vehicle was in operation for 26 days and was not in operation on one day, on 17/6. It has also covered the highest distance of 2,629 km amongst the three Plastic Rathes (42%)

Team Uttarkashi

- Covered 1,838 km
- Listed 119 areas
- Four notices issued to Urban Local Body and Jila Panchayat of Uttarkashi.

Note: Uttarkashi vehicle was in operation for 23 days including Sunday 18/6. It was not in operation for 5 days -- 10/6, 13/6, 15/6, 16/6 and 24/6. It has covered the second highest distance of 1,838 km amongst the three Plastic Rathes (30%)

Team Rishikesh

- Covered 1,719 km
- Listed 159 areas
- Four notices issued Rishikesh, Haridwar, Ghansali and Chamiyala ULB

Note: Rishikesh vehicle was in operation for 24 days and was not in operation for 3 days -- 14/6, 15/6 and 16/6. It has covered a distance of 1,719 km amongst the three Plastic Rathes (28%).

Total working days

Rudraprayag = 26

Uttarkashi = 23

Rishikesh = 24



Observations

The project has been successful in the following ways:

- Create awareness about single-use plastic and waste management
- Instilled a sense of caution among Nagar Nigams and Panchayats, as well as sanitary inspectors.
- Proved that monitoring of strategies is as important as implementing them.

Way forward

The project should definitely continue after rains. To make it more effective, the following steps can be taken:

- A discussion session among the three teams should take place to exchange learnings, lessons, and challenges.
- Conduct an informal survey with Nagar Nigam employees/ heads to assess their challenges when it comes to SUP usage and waste management.
- Build a Google drive for teams to post photos.
- SDC to keep up its weekly reporting on the progress.

Note: The operation of Plastic Rath has been temporarily discontinued due to heavy rains and arrival of the monsoon season in Uttarakhand.



Team Talks

R K Sudhanshu, Principal Secretary, and Chairman, UKPCB

“Plastic waste has indeed become a big challenge along the Char Dham Yatra route, especially since the number of pilgrims this year will be more than the 45 lakh who visited last year. There is a need to manage waste here at all levels possible. I am confident that these Rathes will go a long way in sensitising people about waste management and SUP, while also monitoring and reporting the situation on ground.”

Sushant Pattnaik, Member Secretary, UKPCB

“The Rathes will serve three primary purposes – enforcement, monitoring, and awareness. The teams will monitor the work that is being done by Urban Local Bodies, panchayats, and forest departments, with respect to waste management. Having said that it is also true that managing waste and SUP waste is far more difficult in the hills than it is in the plain areas. For the mission to succeed, there is an urgent need to become more aware of this and sensitise the local communities as well.”

S P Subudhi, Director, State Environment Conservation and Climate Change Directorate

“One of the most effective ways to combat the challenge of SUP is by public awareness programmes that are conducted on a regular basis. This is especially true for the Char Dham Yatra route, which needs even more efforts to ensure that the area becomes SUP-free. I am hopeful that these vehicles will give us an invaluable understanding of the on-ground situation.”

Team Rudraprayag

Vinod Rauthan: “Rudraprayag is teeming with garbage, with dumping zones near the river. They didn't have proper protecting and trash will flow into the river with rain and heavy winds for sure. We urged the Nagar Palika to quite literally clean up their act.

Moving forward, Nandaprayag was better – the markets were clean and the dumping zone was covered, far from the river, with segregation taking place. Joshimath was the best – the new dumping zone was clean and covered, with the old dumping zone (which was near the road and smelled) being cleared of legacy waste. They had sold garbage worth Rs 8 lakh, we were told, and SUP and MLP was being converted into furniture such as benches.” The villages were in a poor state, with the Zila Panchayats not doing their job well. Be it Guptkashi, Sonprayag or Garudchatti, things were bad and there were multiple dumping sites and litter everywhere. We told them that they could dump their trash in the Nagar Palika dumping zones, in case they didn't know.

It made me very angry and I warned that if this carried on, people would not be able to be Badri Kedar due to the mounds of trash here. Some tourists were behaving responsibly with their trash, while some were littering on the road!

Anoop Uniyal: My understanding on waste management has increased immensely. The importance of waste collection, segregation, how it is compacted, sold, are crucial. This project is just the first step. We are set to do bigger and more significant things. The project has also increased the awareness around waste management along the Char Dham route.



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Team Uttarkashi

Hrithik Dobhal: The town of Uttarkashi was really bad. There was trash and dumping sites everywhere – on the road side, near the bridge, outside hotels, in open spaces. There is no waste collection system there, so people simply take their trash and throw it where they see trash is already collecting. In the villages and upper Himalayas, there was less littering and people burn their trash since there, too, there is no waste collection system.



We urged the Nagar Palikas to take action and there was some improvement. The fastest action was taken by hotels. But I fear that once no one tells them to, things will go back to as they were.

I like this work since you are working on the pilgrimage route. Also, I love to travel. It also felt good to be contributing to a cause in a positive way.

Radha Raturi: One of the most significant things that this project has achieved is to create a lot of awareness about single-use plastic and solid waste management. We issued notices to people and communicated with the local people as well as tourists on the same. This should continue so that more and more people join the cause and assess what is happening on the ground. For us as well, the understanding about solid waste management has increased immensely.



Team Rishikesh

Dhani Ram: There is lack of public awareness when it comes to littering, trash, and waste segregation. They just don't know how important it is to not dump and litter. I feel we need to come up with strict punishment and fines if people disobey cleanliness rules. It is through punishment that awareness will increase.



If you go near Srinagar or Ghansali Chamiyala, things are so bad you can't stand near the road. In Ghansali Chamiyala, both Nagar Panchayat and Nagar Nigam are throwing their trash down the hill side, leading to River Bhilangana.

At the same time, the public is not cooperating with the authorities. The market in Rishikesh near Kantinagar has an ever-growing mountain of trash. Things are so bad that people nearby are falling ill now. So now when the authorities are trying to create a dumping zone in Gumaniwala to address the problem, the local public is opposing the move.

Having said that, you also have people like Anil Rawat, a ranger in the Badkot Range Office, who sends his team in the area every morning to clean up the trash. He even seized vehicles that were trying to dump waste in the forest. Such people should be encouraged, appreciated, and rewarded.

Pankaj Baunthiyal: With our encouragement and presence, we managed to get many dumping and littering sites cleaned in several places. Sanitary inspectors, Nagar Nigam and Nagar Panchayat people also became more active. It is also true, however, that more needs to be done, and constant monitoring is key to waste management strategies being implemented properly, at least in the initial stages.



PHOTO GALLERY



Awareness activity at
Gangotri Temple



Awareness activity at Hina village
in Uttarakashi district



Awareness activity at Triveni Ghar
in Rishikesh



Awareness activity at Dhalwala
in Rishikesh



Awareness activity at Patagali, Jakhdar
Ghansali Road, New Tehri



Awareness activity with Nagar Nigam,
Srinagar



Dumping zone for Ghansali Nagar
Panchayat and Chamiyala Nagar
Panchayat, Tehri Garhwal



Benches being made of multi-layer plastic
and tetra packs by Joshimath Nagar
Palika Parishad



Single use plastic water bottles collected
and segregated by Joshimath Nagar
Palika Parishad

PHOTO GALLERY



Trash at Agastmuni, Kedarnath Road, Rudraprayag



Bag distribution and awareness programme at Badrinath Dham



Trash flowing into the Alaknanda river at Rudraprayag



Waste collection and segregation at Tilwara, Kedarnath Road



Trash flowing downhill at Agastmuni, Kedarnath Road



Trash overflowing from the dumping bins at Agastmuni, Kedarnath Road



A large area strewn with trash on the outskirts of Rudraprayag town



Awareness programme at Badrinath Dham

