



40 Years of Bhopal Gas Tragedy

Why in News?

Four decades after [the Bhopal gas tragedy](#), government authorities have **failed to safely dispose of hundreds of tonnes of toxic waste** still **present on** the premises of **Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL)**, despite multiple court orders and warnings.

Key Points

▪ Historical Context and Disposal Challenges:

- The Bhopal gas tragedy was one of the **worst industrial accidents in history that occurred on the night of 2-3 December 1984** at the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant in Bhopal, MP.
 - It exposed people and animals to the highly toxic gas [methyl isocyanate \(MIC\)](#), causing immediate and long-term health effects and deaths.
- Toxic waste generated during [pesticide production](#) between 1969 and 1984 was dumped on-site, with hazardous practices and regulatory negligence worsening contamination.
- In 2005, the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board collected waste, with a portion incinerated and 337 MT stored in a shed.
 - In 2015, [the Central Pollution Control Board](#) incinerated 10 MT on a trial basis and recommended further disposal, which has not occurred.

▪ Government Funding and Toxic Waste Disposal:

- The Union government released Rs 126 crore to the Madhya Pradesh government for disposing of 337 MT of toxic waste stored on the Union Carbide premises since 2005.
- **A 2010 study revealed** the site also contains 11 lakh tonnes of contaminated soil, one tonne of mercury, and nearly 150 tonnes of underground dumps, with no disposal plans for this waste yet.
 - The report noted that the 2005 collection of waste was incomplete, **recommending excavation of buried toxic waste** for remediation.
- The disposal of the 337 MT of waste has yet to begin due to **administrative hurdles**.

▪ Groundwater Contamination:









- Studies have found **groundwater in residential areas** near the factory **contaminated with heavy metals and toxic substances**, raising [cancer](#) and health risks. Experts warn of further contamination during rainy seasons.
 - The government has sealed hand pumps and tube wells and expanded the distribution of safe drinking water to 42 localities near the factory. However, residents continue to use contaminated water for non-drinking purposes.
- Despite these measures, [groundwater contamination continues to spread](#), creating new victims 40 years after the gas tragedy.
 - Health impacts include severe diseases caused by prolonged exposure to toxic substances.

▪ Judicial and Regulatory Oversight:

- The [National Green Tribunal \(NGT\)](#) criticized the government's inaction, emphasizing the leachate's role in contaminating water bodies.
 - It **ordered waste disposal within six months** in March 2022, but the **directive remains unimplemented**.
- Following complaints of groundwater contamination, the Supreme Court directed the state

to enhance access to safe water and address contamination.

//

IMPACT OF GAS EXPOSURE		Key Demands
<p>➤ Younger population born after gas leak equally vulnerable</p> 	<p>Those under 40 years of age and exposed to gas leak, were diagnosed with twice as many illness as the non-gas leak exposed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illness includes cardiac, cancer, respiratory, kidney, TB, typhoid and among others• Twice as many 'gas affected' are dying of cancers, respiratory illnesses -- compared with normal population• Kidney failure rate is 3 times, compared with non-gas affected	<p>➤ To set up a system of registration of deaths of people with direct or indirect exposure</p> <p>➤ Over 5,000 gas victims are cancer patients. Review of the work of the Population Based Cancer Registry in Bhopal that claims that there is no association between gas exposure and cancer</p> <p>➤ Review the system of health-care in place for gas victims</p> <p>➤ Urgently review drug utilization in the care of gas exposed persons to avoid kidney damage</p> 
<p>➤ Those between 31 and 60 (which includes those born after the gas leak of 1984) account for 80% of the suffering</p> 		
<p>➤ Gas affected women suffered illnesses</p>  	 	

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiiias.com/printpdf/40-years-of-bhopal-gas-tragedy>

