

ECOLOGIC

Enjoy the festival with less noise

Diwali is the time to be traditional, share and celebrate. Having a 'Green Diwali' may not occur naturally, but do think about the environmental impact of our festivities. Crackers cause many accidents to workers during manufacture, storage, transport and retail. People and even homes get accidentally burnt. Noise levels startle infants and the elderly, and air pollution affects our environment and health. 'Safe noise level' is about 90 decibels (dB).

Experts warn that continuous exposure to sound in excess of 90dB causes hearing impairment and irreversible changes to the nervous system. The World Health Organisation has fixed 45dB as the safe noise level for a city. The European Union runs competitions annually to rank European cities by various parameters. One parameter requires the cities to draw up a 'sound map' to identify noise levels in particular areas at various times of the day and year.

Metropolitan areas in India register more than 90dB in most areas even during normal times. During Diwali this shoots beyond 125dB, which is disruptive. Car alarms are sometimes triggered when big crackers burst, because it causes air to vibrate at very high magnitudes, which activates their sensors. Dogs hear sounds about 4-7 times louder than a human ear, which makes Diwali particularly stressful.

Animal activists are worried about the effect crackers have on strays as they struggle to find safe shelters. Dogs flee their homes traumatised and disoriented by the explosions, and go missing, and they are unable to find their way back.

The foggy Diwali dawn is the characteristic of another major environmental problem — air pollution! Be rest assured that all crackers including the colorful flower pots, chakrams, sparklers and wires emit harmful

toxins when they are lit. Air pollution shoots up by 50% during this time in

major Indian cities as levels of oxides and dioxides of sulphur and nitrogen skyrocket. So do suspended particulates causing children and elderly with breathing disorders like asthma to suffer the most.

State Pollution Control Boards are to certify the noise and pollution caused by crackers; but most crackers in shops, often sold in crowded areas with hardly any fire and safety protection are unlikely to meet standards; especially the cheaper and illegal imports from China.

The paper and cardboard wastes after the celebrations is an even bigger problem. They cannot be recycled for they carry high residual chemicals. Inevitably these wastes are burnt polluting the air or reach landfills to poison ground water. Cities in the US celebrate Independence Day by organising fireworks in a public space.

Fireworks light up high in the night skies and citizens congregate to watch the colourful, loud and smoky displays at a scheduled time. Maybe there is something to learn from this. Be an informed consumer and check with the stores before purchase to make smart choices for your family. Or better still, have a joyful and cracker free celebration this year, and feel great that you have contributed a little to save the earth, its vulnerable inhabitants and voiceless creatures — Happy Diwali!



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