International Journal of Applied and Universal Research **E-ISSN No: 2395-0269**
Volume XIII, Issue V, September– October 2026 **Available online at: www.ijaur.com**
Impact Factor- 5.999

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT IN BHOPAL: CURRENT STATUS, ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT:- Solid waste management is a critical urban environmental issue in Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, India. Rapid urbanisation, population growth, changing consumption patterns and expanding commercial activities have increased the quantity and complexity of municipal solid waste generated in the city. Effective management requires an integrated system involving waste segregation at source, door-to-door collection, transportation, material recovery, composting, recycling, scientific treatment and safe disposal of residual waste. Bhopal has undertaken municipal waste-management initiatives, including improvements in collection and processing infrastructure and the remediation of legacy waste at the former Bhanpur dumping site. However, challenges related to segregation, plastic waste, organic waste processing, informal recycling, environmental monitoring and public participation remain important areas of concern. Improperly managed waste can contaminate soil and water, contribute to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, clog drainage systems and create conditions that favour disease vectors. This study examines the current status of solid waste management in Bhopal, identifies its principal environmental challenges and proposes sustainable strategies based on the principles of the circular economy, resource recovery, decentralized processing, inclusive governance and community participation. It argues that long-term improvements depend not only on collection efficiency but also on reducing waste generation, recovering valuable materials and ensuring environmentally sound treatment and disposal.

KEYWORDS:- Solid waste management, Bhopal, municipal waste, legacy waste, environmental pollution, waste segregation, circular economy, sustainable urban development.

INTRODUCTION:-

Solid waste management refers to the systematic collection, segregation, storage, transportation, processing, recovery and disposal of solid materials discarded by households, commercial establishments, institutions, industries and other urban activities. In developing urban centres such as Bhopal, waste management has become increasingly important because of urban expansion, rising living standards, packaged consumer goods and the growing use of disposable products. Municipal authorities must manage a diverse waste stream consisting of biodegradable waste, recyclable materials, plastics, sanitary waste, domestic hazardous waste, construction debris and other residual materials.

Bhopal presents an important case study because it combines residential neighbourhoods, commercial districts, institutional areas, expanding peri-urban settlements and environmentally sensitive water bodies. The city is also associated with the Bhopal lakes and the wider Upper Lake catchment, making the prevention of waste leakage into drains and watercourses particularly relevant.

The problem is not limited to removing garbage from streets. Sustainable solid waste management requires the prevention of waste generation, separation of waste at source, efficient recovery of resources, scientific

treatment of organic materials and safe disposal of waste that cannot be recovered.

The overall objective is to develop a system that protects public health, conserves natural resources, reduces pollution and supports a cleaner, more resilient urban environment.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY-

- To examine the current status and institutional arrangements of solid waste management in Bhopal.
- To identify the major environmental and public-health challenges associated with municipal waste.
- To evaluate the limitations of conventional collection, treatment and disposal practices.
- To suggest sustainable, technically feasible and socially inclusive management strategies.
- To recommend indicators for monitoring progress towards a cleaner and more resource-efficient city.

METHODOLOGY:-

This study follows a descriptive and analytical approach, drawing on the policy framework for municipal solid waste management in India, publicly available information about Bhopal's waste-management initiatives, and established environmental-management principles. The discussion distinguishes between documented historical initiatives, ongoing management priorities and proposed future interventions. Exact quantities of waste generated, collected, processed and disposed of should be verified against the latest Bhopal Municipal Corporation records and official environmental reports before the study is used as a formal research submission.

Current status of solid waste management in Bhopal

Bhopal has developed a relatively extensive municipal waste collection and processing system. Nevertheless, the management of accumulated waste at disposal sites demonstrates that high collection coverage does not automatically guarantee environmentally safe waste management.

Municipal waste collection and transportation

The Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) is the principal municipal authority responsible for household waste collection, street cleaning, transportation, processing arrangements and disposal. A Government of India report on Swachh Survekshan 2023 described a system with the following infrastructure and operational figures:

- Approximately **850 tonnes of municipal waste per day** reported as generated.
- 469 door-to-door garbage collection vehicles.
- 202 road-sweeping and waste-collection vehicles.
- 12 transfer stations and six material recovery facilities.
- A 100-tonne-per-day construction and demolition waste processing plant at Thuakheda.

Waste segregation and material recovery

Waste segregation is the separation of waste into different categories before collection or processing. It allows biodegradable material to be treated separately from recyclables and potentially hazardous waste. Bhopal has established transfer stations and material recovery facilities to support this process. Nevertheless, maintaining effective segregation throughout the waste chain remains essential. When wet and dry waste are mixed, organic materials can contaminate paper, cardboard and other recyclables. Contamination reduces the value of recovered materials and makes mechanical sorting more difficult. Mixed waste also complicates composting, biomethanation and the production of refuse-derived fuel.

Processing and resource recovery

Bhopal's reported waste-management initiatives include organic waste processing, material recovery, construction and demolition waste recycling, and plans for converting dry municipal waste into alternative fuel.
Biodegradable waste from households, markets, hotels and institutions can be converted into compost or biogas. A Bio-CNG project was announced for Adampur with a planned capacity of 400 tonnes per day. Its current operating status and actual throughput require verification.



Organic waste processing

These facilities separate reusable and recyclable materials such as paper, metals, plastics and selected packaging materials. Their effectiveness depends on the quality of incoming waste and access to reliable recycling markets.



Construction and demolition waste

Concrete, bricks, soil and metal can be recovered for reuse or recycled into aggregates and other construction products. Bhopal's reported Thuakheda facility represents an important part of this waste stream's management.



Material recovery facilities



Legacy waste remediation

Bioremediation and biomining can separate recoverable materials, soil-like fractions and combustible waste from old dumps. Their success depends on proper testing, safe handling of rejects and compliance with environmental standards.

2.4 Legacy waste: Bhanpur and Adampur







Legacy waste is the accumulated waste deposited at a dumpsite over many years, often without adequate engineering controls.

Bhopal's experience demonstrates the difference between completed remediation at one site and the continuing challenges at another.

- **Bhanpur:** Government reporting in January 2024 described scientific treatment of the former dumpsite and reclamation of approximately 21 acres, with a park established on part of the reclaimed land.

- **Adampur Chawani:** A Central Pollution Control Board inspection report, as reported in January 2026, identified approximately 454,525 tonnes of legacy waste over 27 acres and delays in remediation, along with deficiencies in monitoring and fire prevention.

The regulatory framework establishes the responsibilities of municipal authorities, waste generators, processing facilities and pollution-control agencies. For Bhopal, effective implementation will require alignment between municipal collection practices, processing capacity, contractual obligations and environmental compliance.

Summary of the current situation

Component	Reported position or key issue
Door-to-door collection	Extensive collection infrastructure reported; current service performance needs verification.
Waste segregation	Transfer stations and recovery facilities exist; consistent separation remains essential.
Organic waste	Composting and Bio-CNG initiatives provide opportunities for resource recovery.
Recyclable waste	Material recovery infrastructure has been reported.
Construction waste	A dedicated processing facility has been reported at Thuakheda.
Legacy waste	Bhanpur remediation was reported; Adampur remains a major concern in 2026.
Environmental monitoring	Fire prevention, leachate control, operational records and remediation progress require sustained attention.

Major provisions relevant to Bhopal

Regulatory area	Requirement or implication
Four-stream segregation	Separate wet, dry, sanitary and special-care waste at source.
Bulk waste generators	Defined categories of large generators must fulfil applicable processing and accountability obligations.
Material recovery	Dry waste should be directed to appropriate sorting and recycling facilities.
Organic waste	Wet waste should be composted or processed through biomethanation at appropriate facilities.
Online monitoring	Digital reporting and tracking cover waste generation, collection, transportation, processing and disposal.
Legacy dumpsites	Mapping, assessment and time-bound biomining or bioremediation are required.
Environmental accountability	Environmental compensation and regulatory enforcement apply to relevant violations.
Landfill management	Landfilling is restricted to permitted residual waste and inert material, subject to applicable requirements.

Source: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Central Pollution Control Board.

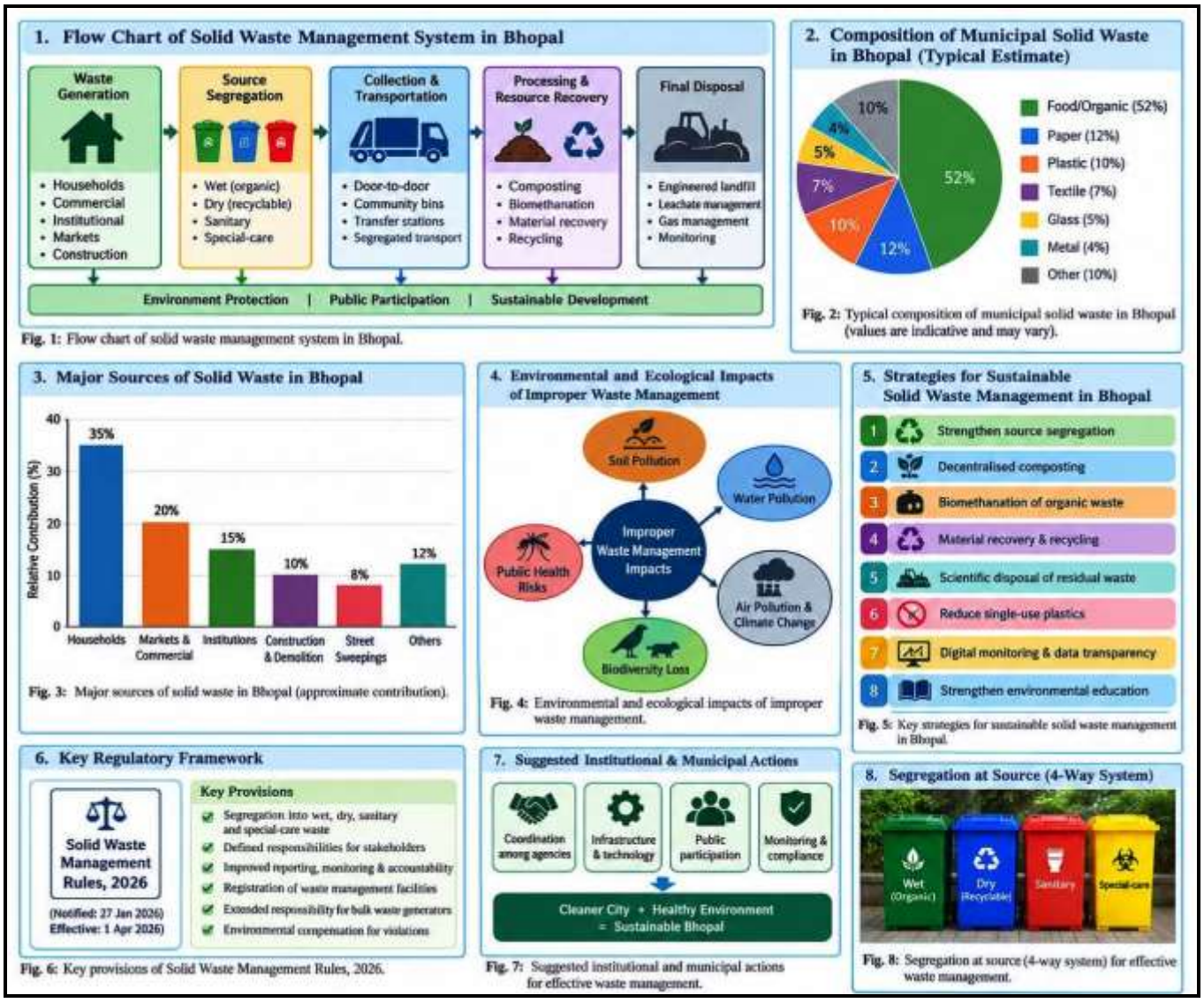

Fig. 1: Flow chart of solid waste management system in Bhopal.

Fig. 2: Typical composition of municipal solid waste in Bhopal (values are indicative and may vary).

Fig. 3: Major sources of solid waste in Bhopal (approximate contribution).

Fig. 4: Environmental and ecological impacts of improper waste management.

Fig. 5: Key strategies for sustainable solid waste management in Bhopal.

Fig. 6: Key provisions of Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026.

Fig. 7: Suggested institutional and municipal actions for effective waste management.

Fig. 8: Segregation at source (4-way system) for effective waste management.

Proposed action plan for Bhopal

The following is a recommended implementation schedule, not an official municipal commitment.

Time frame	Priority actions	Suggested performance indicators
0–6 months	Verify waste flows; audit facilities; improve source segregation; strengthen fire safety at disposal sites.	Waste-flow baseline completed; facilities audited; fire-safety actions documented.
6–18 months	Improve organic-waste processing, material recovery, bulk-generator compliance and public reporting.	Higher verified segregation and processing rates; fewer rejected loads; regular public reports.
18–36 months	Advance legacy waste remediation, expand markets for recovered products and improve landfill safeguards.	Verified reduction in legacy waste; documented destination of recovered fractions; environmental monitoring compliance.

Continuous	Public education, worker protection, independent audits and digital tracking.	Complaint resolution, worker safety indicators, data completeness and audit findings.

Overall, Bhopal's waste-management system combines significant collection infrastructure with ongoing challenges in the environmentally safe treatment of waste and the remediation of old dumpsites. The key policy question is how to ensure that every stage—from household segregation to final disposal—is reliable, traceable and compliant with environmental requirements.

Environmental challenges of solid waste management in Bhopal

Soil contamination

Open dumping and poorly controlled disposal can introduce plastics, heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants and other contaminants into the soil. The composition of leachate depends on the waste deposited, its age, moisture content and decomposition conditions.

Potential consequences include:

- Deterioration of soil quality.
- Reduced suitability of affected land for certain uses.
- Contamination of soil and groundwater near disposal facilities.
- Long-term remediation costs and restrictions on land reuse.

These risks are particularly relevant at old dumpsites where waste has accumulated without adequate liners, leachate collection or systematic monitoring.

Groundwater and surface-water pollution

Leachate is the liquid formed when water moves through waste and dissolves or carries contaminants. If it escapes from a dumpsite, it can enter the surrounding soil, groundwater or surface-water drainage system.

In Bhopal, protecting the lakes, stormwater drains and associated catchments is important for environmental quality and urban water security. Potential impacts include increased organic pollution, elevated nutrient concentrations, microbial contamination and changes in water quality. These effects should be established through site-specific sampling rather than assumed to occur uniformly throughout the city.

Air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions

Organic waste decomposes under oxygen-limited conditions and produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Uncontrolled waste fires can release particulate matter, carbon monoxide and other harmful combustion products.

Important sources of air pollution associated with waste management include:

- Open burning of mixed waste.
- Fires in old waste heaps.
- Dust from waste handling and transportation.
- Methane emissions from decomposing organic material.
- Odours from poorly managed organic waste and leachate.

Reducing biodegradable waste sent to dumpsites, improving fire prevention and maintaining appropriate landfill gas controls can reduce these risks.

Public-health risks

Improper waste storage and disposal can create breeding and feeding sites for flies, mosquitoes, rodents and other pests. Exposed waste may also pose risks through direct contact, contaminated water, sharp objects and hazardous household discards. Sanitation workers and informal waste pickers may face additional occupational hazards, particularly when handling mixed waste without suitable protective equipment. Public-health protection therefore requires reliable collection, safe handling practices, appropriate protective equipment, timely removal of waste and access to occupational health services.

Plastic pollution and drainage obstruction

Single-use plastics, multilayer packaging and other lightweight materials can escape from collection points and enter drains or watercourses.

Plastic waste can:

- Block stormwater drains and contribute to localised flooding.
- Degrade into smaller fragments, including microplastics.

- Harm terrestrial and aquatic organisms.
- Reduce the quality of compost when mixed with biodegradable waste.
- Increase the volume of residual material requiring disposal.

Effective segregation, collection of recyclable plastics, enforcement of applicable plastic-waste rules and reduction of unnecessary packaging are therefore important.

Land use, aesthetics and social impacts

Uncontrolled dumping affects the appearance of neighbourhoods, produces odours, attracts pests and can reduce the amenity value of nearby land.

Communities living close to waste-processing or disposal facilities may experience disproportionate environmental burdens. Sustainable management must therefore incorporate environmental justice, transparent consultation, appropriate site selection and protection for workers and nearby residents.

Institutional and financial constraints

Waste management requires continuing expenditure on vehicles, fuel, labour, equipment, maintenance, processing plants, environmental monitoring and disposal. Common risks include:

- Inadequate maintenance of collection and processing equipment.
- Delays in contracts and remediation projects.
- Insufficient operational data.
- Weak coordination among municipal agencies and contractors.
- Limited public participation in segregation.
- Insufficient markets for compost and recovered materials.

The reported delays at Adampur illustrate why infrastructure development must be accompanied by clear responsibility, credible project schedules and independent monitoring.

Legal and policy framework

As of October 2026, the principal national regulatory framework is the **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026**, notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and effective from 1 April 2026. These rules supersede the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.

The revised framework is particularly relevant to Bhopal because it strengthens source segregation, accountability, monitoring and the remediation of legacy dumpsites.

Electoral Inclusion → Access → Opportunity → Motivation → Political Participation → Voter Turnout

Thus, meaningful electoral participation requires not only the formal right to vote but also the practical ability and motivation to exercise that right.

Sustainable management strategies for Bhopal

Sustainable solid waste management should follow the waste hierarchy: prevention first, followed by reuse, recycling, biological treatment, recovery of energy where appropriate, and safe disposal of unavoidable residuals.

Integrated waste-management model

1. Waste prevention and reduction

Avoid unnecessary packaging and disposable products

2. Segregation at source

Wet · Dry · Sanitary · Special-care waste

Wet waste -Composting and biogas production

Dry waste- Material recovery and recycling

Sanitary waste- Separate handling and authorised treatment

Special-care waste- Dedicated collection and safe treatment

3. Scientific treatment and disposal

Recover useful materials and energy where suitable; landfill only eligible residual waste

Strengthen segregation at source

Households, shops, offices, educational institutions and other waste generators should separate waste before collection.

Recommended measures include:

- Providing clearly labelled containers for the four required waste streams.

- Ensuring that collection workers receive segregated waste separately.
- Conducting regular ward-level inspections and awareness campaigns.
- Introducing transparent, legally compliant incentives and penalties.
- Tracking contamination rates at collection points and processing facilities.

Segregation must continue during transportation and transfer. Collecting separated waste only to mix it later would undermine the entire system.

Expand decentralised composting and biomethanation

A substantial share of municipal waste in Indian cities is biodegradable. Processing this fraction close to where it is generated can reduce transportation costs and the quantity of waste requiring final disposal.





Bhopal should prioritise decentralised organic-waste processing at:

- Vegetable and fruit markets.
- Hotels, restaurants and food courts.
- Large residential societies.
- Universities, hospitals and institutional campuses.
- Municipal parks and horticultural facilities.

Community composting can turn suitable organic waste into soil amendments, while biomethanation can generate biogas for appropriate energy uses.

The resulting compost should be tested for quality and contaminant levels before use. Biogas plants also require reliable feedstock, trained operators, odour control and safe management of digestate.

Improve material recovery and recycling

Material recovery facilities should be strengthened to separate recyclable materials from dry waste and direct them towards authorised recycling channels.

Priority actions include:

- Installing appropriate sorting equipment where economically justified.
- Improving the quality of recovered paper, plastics, glass and metals.
- Establishing reliable contracts with recycling enterprises.
- Reducing contamination through better household segregation.

- Integrating informal waste pickers into formal recovery systems.

Waste pickers already contribute to resource recovery by collecting materials of economic value. Their inclusion through cooperatives, recognised service arrangements, protective equipment and fair payment can improve livelihoods while strengthening recycling performance.

Accelerate legacy waste remediation at Adampur

Adampur requires a time-bound, independently monitored remediation programme. The reported legacy-waste backlog and fire-related concerns make this an important environmental priority.

The programme should include:

1. **Updated site assessment:** Verify the quantity, depth, composition and spatial distribution of accumulated waste.
2. **Biomining and screening:** Separate recoverable materials, suitable soil-like fractions, combustible material and rejects using an approved process.
3. **Environmental testing:** Assess recovered fractions before reuse and characterise materials requiring further treatment or disposal.
4. **Leachate management:** Maintain collection, treatment and monitoring systems to minimise contamination.
5. **Fire prevention:** Monitor temperatures and methane, maintain firebreaks and ensure emergency equipment is functional.
6. **Independent verification:** Publish progress reports showing quantities excavated, processed, recovered and safely disposed of.
7. **Site restoration:** Rehabilitate the land only after appropriate environmental and geotechnical assessments.

Biomining should not be treated simply as a method of moving waste from one location to another. Its purpose is to reduce the environmental burden of the dumpsite and ensure that each recovered or rejected fraction reaches a suitable destination.

Develop appropriate waste-to-energy solutions

Waste-to-energy technologies can help manage selected non-recyclable waste, but they should not replace waste prevention, recycling or organic-waste treatment.

Potential options include:

- Producing refuse-derived fuel (RDF) from suitable combustible residuals.
- Sending compliant RDF to authorised cement kilns or other suitable industrial facilities.
- Using biomethanation for appropriately segregated organic waste.
- Evaluating thermal treatment only after detailed technical, financial and environmental assessment.

Bhopal's announced torrefied-charcoal project illustrates an effort to recover energy from dry municipal waste. However, a plant's proposed capacity is not equivalent to its actual processing performance.

Project evaluation should examine feedstock quality, emissions-control systems, energy consumption, operational costs, ash and residue disposal, and the availability of reliable end users. Recycling materials with greater reuse value should remain a priority.

Improve landfill engineering and environmental monitoring

Landfills should receive only waste that is legally permitted for disposal after appropriate recovery and treatment.

Essential safeguards include:

- Engineered liners and leachate collection systems where required.
- Regular groundwater and surface-water quality testing.
- Methane and landfill-gas monitoring.
- Fire prevention and emergency response plans.
- Controlled stormwater drainage.
- Routine inspection and independent environmental audits.
- Scientific closure and post-closure monitoring.

Monitoring results should be publicly accessible, with corrective action triggered when environmental standards are exceeded.

Establish a digital waste-management monitoring system

Bhopal should use the national Centralised Online Portal for Solid Waste Management and complementary municipal systems to improve accountability. A city dashboard could track:

- Ward-wise waste generation and collection.
- Segregation and contamination rates.
- Quantities processed by each facility.
- Recyclable materials recovered.
- Compost and biogas production.
- Legacy waste treated and residual waste disposed of.
- Vehicle movement and collection complaints.
- Environmental monitoring results.
- Contractual performance and project expenditure.

Data should be independently audited and clearly distinguish installed capacity from actual throughput. This would help residents and policymakers assess whether waste is being managed safely, rather than merely collected.

Strengthen public participation and environmental education

Public participation is essential because waste is generated at the household, institutional and commercial levels.

A sustained awareness programme should involve:

- Schools and colleges.
- Resident welfare associations.
- Market associations.
- Community organisations.
- Sanitation workers and waste pickers.
- Hotels, restaurants and commercial establishments.

Campaigns should explain segregation requirements, home composting, responsible disposal of sanitary and special-care waste, reduction of single-use products and reporting of illegal dumping.

Information should be communicated in Hindi and English through community meetings, local media, educational activities and digital channels. Residents should also have accessible systems for reporting missed collections, open dumping and burning.

Introduce stronger financial and institutional mechanisms

Sustainable waste management requires stable funding, accountable contracts and coordination among municipal authorities, the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board, waste processors and other relevant agencies.

Possible measures include:

- Applying user charges in accordance with applicable municipal rules.
- Linking contractor payments to verified service quality and treatment outcomes.
- Using polluter-pays provisions where legally applicable.
- Requiring bulk generators to fulfil their statutory responsibilities.
- Supporting recycling enterprises and markets for recovered products.
- Publishing municipal expenditure and performance data.
- Ensuring sufficient funds for facility maintenance and environmental monitoring.

Financial planning should consider the full life-cycle cost of waste management, including the future costs of landfill closure and environmental remediation.

Expected benefits of sustainable waste management

Successful implementation of these strategies could produce several interconnected benefits.

Environmental benefits

- Reduced soil and water contamination.
- Lower methane emissions from decomposing organic waste.
- Fewer waste fires and less open burning.
- Reduced plastic leakage into drains and water bodies.
- Lower demand for land used for waste disposal.

Economic benefits

- Recovery of recyclable materials and useful organic products.
- Potential energy production from suitable waste streams.
- Reduced expenditure on uncontrolled dumping and emergency remediation.
- Employment opportunities in collection, recycling, composting and environmental monitoring.

Social and public-health benefits

- Cleaner residential and commercial neighbourhoods.
- Reduced exposure to pests, smoke and contaminated waste.
- Safer working conditions for sanitation workers.
- Better environmental conditions for communities near waste facilities.
- Greater public confidence through transparent reporting and accountability.

These benefits depend on effective implementation, adequate funding, appropriate technology and reliable environmental safeguards.

DISCUSSION:-

Bhopal's experience highlights an important distinction between service coverage and environmental performance. A city may achieve extensive door-to-door collection and receive favourable cleanliness assessments while still facing significant problems involving accumulated waste, treatment bottlenecks or disposal-site remediation. The historical municipal figures and the more recent reporting on Adampur illustrate this distinction. Collection infrastructure and resource-recovery initiatives are valuable, but their benefits are limited if untreated waste continues to accumulate or environmental controls are not properly maintained.

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026 provide a stronger framework for segregation, accountability, and digital monitoring and legacy-waste remediation. Their effectiveness in Bhopal will depend on implementation at the ward level, adequate processing infrastructure, cooperation from waste generators and transparent enforcement.

The most appropriate long-term approach is an integrated waste-management system in which waste prevention, segregation, recycling and biological treatment are prioritised, with energy recovery used selectively and landfilling restricted to eligible residual materials.

CONCLUSION:-

Solid waste management in Bhopal is a complex urban environmental challenge involving waste generation, collection, segregation, treatment, recycling, disposal and the remediation of legacy dumpsites. The city has developed substantial collection infrastructure and undertaken initiatives involving material recovery, construction waste recycling and organic-waste processing. The reported remediation of Bhanpur also demonstrates the potential for recovering land previously occupied by accumulated waste. However, continuing concerns at Adampur show that sustainable waste management requires more than collection infrastructure and proposed treatment capacity. Effective environmental protection depends on timely remediation, reliable processing operations, safe disposal of residuals, fire prevention, leachate control and independently verified performance data. The implementation of the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026 offers an opportunity to strengthen these systems through four-stream segregation, greater accountability for bulk waste generators, digital monitoring and time-bound legacy-waste management. Ultimately, Bhopal's progress towards sustainable urban development will depend on a coordinated approach involving municipal authorities, regulatory agencies, businesses, waste workers and residents. By treating waste as a resource wherever feasible and preventing the uncontrolled release of pollutants, the city can reduce environmental risks, improve public health and develop a more circular and resilient urban economy.

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