

Ministry of Coal Unveils Report of the High-Powered Expert Committee on Gainful Utilization of Overburden (OB) in the Coal Sector

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In a significant move towards sustainability and efficient natural resource management, Union Minister of Coal & Mines, Shri G. Kishan Reddy today unveiled the **Report of the High-Powered Expert Committee (HPEC) on Gainful Utilization of Overburden (OB) in the Coal Sector** during the Half-Yearly Review of the Coal Sector at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan, New Delhi. The event was graced by the presence of Union Minister of State for Coal & Mines, Shri Satish Chandra Dubey, Secretary, Ministry of Coal, Shri Vikram Dev Dutt, senior officials from the Ministry of Coal and CMDs of Coal/Lignite PSUs.



The HPEC comprised multi-disciplinary experts from five central ministries, NITI Aayog, and coal companies. The committee was tasked with identifying innovative ways to utilize overburden, which consists of soil, rock, and minerals, traditionally discarded as waste during coal mining operations.

The report outlines a comprehensive framework for using OB as a valuable resource. Historically seen as waste, OB is now being positioned as an asset with the potential to contribute significantly to environmental sustainability, economic development and create employment opportunities for local communities. The HPEC report advocates for a 'Whole Mining' approach that aims to integrate overburden into the economic value chain, contributing to sustainable mining practices.

Key highlights of the report include strategies for processing OB to produce Manufactured-Sand (M-Sand), which can be used in construction projects, reducing the dependency on river sand and preventing environmental degradation. The commercial sale of this M-sand is expected to generate significant revenue for coal companies, and support local economies.

The HPEC report anticipated several key benefits for coal communities. Processing OB to produce M-Sand not only generates significant revenue for coal companies but also supports local economies by offering cheaper, high-quality sand for construction. Establishing OB-to-sand processing plants will create jobs, boosting livelihoods in coal mining areas. Effective OB utilization, reclaims land for productive uses like agriculture or infrastructure by reducing the need for OB dumps. By decreasing dependence on river sand for construction industries, OB processing also protects ecosystems from erosion and degradation. Additionally, OB contains valuable resources such as clay, limestone, and rare earth elements, which can support infrastructure development and other industries. Several successful pilot plants have demonstrated the viability of this initiative, contributing to environmental sustainability and fostering community engagement, trust, and well-being.

In a significant step towards promoting a circular economy and turning waste into wealth, Coal/Lignite PSUs have commissioned four OB processing plants and five OB-to-M-sand pilot plants. Additionally, six more OB processing and OB-to-M-sand plants are currently in various stages of installation within the Coal/Lignite PSUs.



Amlohri Plant, NCL, Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh

The launch of this report marks a crucial step in the coal sector's journey towards a circular economy, where waste is minimized, and resources are maximized. The Ministry of Coal, in collaboration with various stakeholders, is committed to implementing the recommendations of the HPEC report, with a focus on benefiting the environment, the economy, and the communities surrounding coal mining regions, in line with India's broader goals of achieving environmental sustainability and resource efficiency.

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