Harvest the rain before hard times hit you!

DECCAN CHRONICLE. | AKNISREE KARTHIK AND AKSHEEV THAKUR

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If the city takes up rain water harvesting and also recycles waste water, it can conserve up to 31 tmcft of water.

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It is time the burden on Cauvery river is reduced and rainwater harvesting is taken up seriously by Bengalureans. If the city harvests rainwater, it can conserve up to 15tmcft of water, which is nearly 80 per cent of Bengaluru's requirement of 19 tmcft per annum. Though BWSSB has identified over 1.4 lakh properties that are supposed to install rainwater harvesting systems, only 72,500 have complied till July 2017. Water experts, who are not happy with the progress, say that the water board should take up publicity initiatives and set realistic goals to achieve 100 percent compliance. Experts argue that water crisis in the city will worsen over the years and RWH is the only way out, report Aknisree Karthik and Aksheev Thakur.

Bengaluru, on an average, receives 700-800 mm of rain. If RWH is taken up comprehensively, the city can conserve up to 15 tmcft of rainwater, which is nearly 80 percent of our Cauvery water requirement of 19 tmcft per annum, said water expert and lead scientist at IISC T.V. Ramachandra.

If the city takes up RWH and also recycles waste water, it can conserve up to 31 tmcft of water, he points out. "If we catch rainwater, we can save up to 15 tmcft and if we recycle waste water, we get another 16 tmcft of water," he said.

"The well-to-do do not have any concern for the environment and ignore RWH. They defend their decision not to install RWH systems, saying they don't have space in their buildings to store rainwater. If they cannot harvest and store rainwater, they can at least divert the collected rainwater to a recharging pit, which will help recharge depleting groundwater levels," he said.

Citizens' Action Forum president Mr D.S. Rajashekar on the lack of compliance from citizens, said, "How many government offices have RWH systems in place? It is more obligatory on them to do this and set an example for the citizens."

On the awareness campaigns taken up by the BWSSB, he said, "Whatever the water board is doing is not sufficient. Campaigns should be held on every street. Citizens should be made aware of the present scenario prevailing over Cauvery river, how the natural resources is being burdened, how there has been a population explosion in the city, etc. Then, the people should be made to realise that there isn't enough water in Cauvery to meet the growing demands of the city."

Mr Rajashekar said, "Eight monsoon seasons have gone by since the state government made rainwater harvesting mandatory, but we have seen only 50 percent compliance. RWH should not be enforced on citizens; it should be treated as a joint effort of the government and citizens."

A road map has to be drawn up with a proper plan on how to achieve 100 percent compliance within a short period, say a year, he said.

Fact-file

In 2009, BWSSB made it mandatory for all existing building in 60x40 sqft sites and upcoming ones on 30x40 sqft plots to install RWH.

BWSSB identified over 1.4 lakh properties that are supposed to install RWH.

Of the identified ones, only 72,500 properties have installed RWH systems till now.

The water board, to motivate citizens to take up RWH, is organising street plays, awareness campaigns, seminars and workshops.

The RWH theme park in Jayanagar has all working RWH working models to help citizens choose the one that suits their need.

This apart, the BWSSB has listed the resources to set up RWH systems, like plumbers, on their website.

BWSSB sources said that from July 2016 till May 2017, a fine of Rs 7.69 crore has been collected from defaulters.

'We have to make errant building owners fall in line'

The BWSSB claims it is doing all it can to increase the number of rainwater harvesting structures in the city, but till now, only half of the total identified properties have fallen in line.

Ask BWSSB chairman Tushar Girinath on the poor conversion ratio, he says, "We have taken up all sorts of measures to make people aware of the benefits of rainwater harvesting. Be it roping in local NGOs or Bharath Scouts and Guides to carry the message of RWH to every households in the city, the BWSSB is doing its bit." He said that pamphlets have been distributed and street plays conducted regularly, elaborating the benefits of RWH to impress upon the people to take up RWH voluntarily.

"This apart, we have all been working on display models at our RWH theme park. Visitors can see every single working model available on RWH. Our engineers assist the visitors and explain different models to help people choose what suits them," he said.

But still, the compliance is low. Those who do not fall in line have been severely penalised. Structures without RWH have to pay 25 percent of the water bill as fine for the first three months. After three months, the fine doubles, he explained. BWSSB sources said that from July 2016 to May 2017, fines of Rs 7.69 crore have been collected from defaulters. "Getting the needed resources like plumbers and skilled labourers is not a difficult task. We have listed all the details on our website. It is the people who have to make up their mind to install RWH systems and conserve water for the benefit of the future generations," he advised.

On the reasons for the people not complying with the rules, he said, "According to the RWH notification, the existing buildings built on 60x40 sqft plot should install RWH systems. As majority of these buildings do not have adequate space or arrangement to install RWH, they are not falling in line."

On how the BWSSB will make buildings that do not have a BWSSB connection to fall in line, he said, "We do not have any mechanism now. As groundwater is under the purview of the Department of Mines and Geology, we have to evolve a system to make such building owners fall in line."