

# Why are Bengaluru lakes always on fire? All you wanted to know about city's chemical snowfall

**The city of beautiful lakes is turning into a city of sewage-filled water bodies that either overflow with toxic foam or catch fire.**



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It has been 'snowing' in parts of Bengaluru for the last two-three days. The snow, however, is not something that Bengalureans are enjoying.

Pictures of toxic foam from Bengaluru's Varthur lake spilling on to the streets, shared widely on social media, have got not just Bengaluru but the country talking about how the beautiful city of

lakhs is now turning into a city of sewage-filled water bodies that either overflow with toxic foam or catch fire.

Before Varthur lake, Bengaluru's Bellandur lake has often been in news for [catching fire](#)--a fire was reported in a part of the lake as recently as May 7.

Given the regularity of such incidents in Bengaluru, Karnataka Chief Minister [Siddaramaiah](#) reportedly said that this happens every year.

### **WHY THE FIRE**

While experts believed that pre-monsoon showers in the city were the reasons behind the toxic foaming in Varthur lake, oil and phosphorus on a lake surface usually cause the fire in lakes such as the Bellandur.

In both the scenarios, it is pollution of the water bodies that is to be blamed. The sustained inflow of untreated or partially treated sewage and industrial effluents have clogged the lakes.



**A fire in Bellandur lake.**

A 2016 [report by the Indian Institute of Science](#) (IISc), Bengaluru, states that nearly 98 per cent of the lakes in the city have been encroached, and 90 per cent of the lakes are sewage-fed.

The unplanned urbanisation of Bengaluru and poor governance have hit the 262 lakes and tanks in the city. According to the IISc report 'Wetlands: Treasure of Bangalore', 38 per cent of the lakes are surrounded by slums and 82 per cent lakes have witnessed a loss in catchment area.

As a result, these lakes swell with toxic foam during monsoon and often this toxic foam spills on to the streets, threatening to cause a major health hazard in the city.

## **A WATER CRISIS**

With high levels of contamination in the lakes, Bengaluru is likely to face a serious shortage of clean water in the years to come.

According to a [Guardian report](#), experts predict a severe water crisis which will make Bengaluru uninhabitable by 2025, with residents potentially having to be evacuated.



**The toxic foam from Varthur lake spilling on to the streets.**

On April 19, the National Green Tribunal ordered that all industries around the Bellandur Lake must be shut down and a fine of Rs 5 lakh will be imposed on anyone found dumping waste in and around the lake.

The tribunal also asked the Karnataka government, the State Pollution Control Board, Lake Development Authority and the Bengaluru Development Authority to start cleaning the lake immediately and report back in a month's time.

Cleaning up of the Bellandur is a mammoth task--it is the largest lake in Bengaluru and receives nearly 40 per cent of the city's sewage.

In Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's own words, the state government is currently "racing against time" to clean up the Bellandur.

## **THE ROAD AHEAD**

Better governance and ensuring that only treated sewage enters the lakes are perhaps ways in which Bengaluru can fight the crisis and clean its lakes of the filth.

The IISc report cites the example of rejuvenation of the Jakkur Lake to show how allowing treated sewage into the lake helped bring it back to life. The groundwater levels in areas surrounding the Jakkur Lake have also gone up.

According to experts, checking the practice of land-grabbing and setting up a decentralised system of treating sewage and solid waste can also help in keeping Bengaluru's lakes clean