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[NEW REPORT](#) FINDS THAT INFORMAL RECYCLING IN DELHI REDUCES CO2 BY 962,133 TONS

Copenhagen: As governments struggle to develop an international plan for combating climate change, a new report from a leading Indian environment group has found that informal recycling makes a huge but unappreciated contribution towards the reduction of greenhouse gases.

The report, '[Cooling Agents](#)', was released last week by the Delhi-based Chintan Environmental Action and Research Group in partnership with The Advocacy Project (AP), at the climate summit in Copenhagen. It is the first attempt to quantify the impact of informal recycling on climate change in India.

The report estimates that informal recycling in Delhi reduced CO2 emissions by 962,133 tons last year - roughly equivalent to taking 175,000 vehicles off the road. But, it says, this achievement is ignored by the Indian authorities, which use private waste collectors that compete with recycling, are less energy-efficient and are failing to halt Delhi's massive garbage crisis.



"Climate justice means identifying those who are doing the most to fight climate change and rewarding and harnessing their work," says the report.

The report is also critical of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the UN program that allocates international carbon credits, for supporting projects which reduce emissions from waste after it is discarded. Instead, says the report, the CDM should encourage recycling, which prevents carbon from entering the production cycle in the first place.

The Copenhagen conference is seeking to replace the Kyoto Protocol when the current agreement ends on December 31, 2012, and 'Cooling Agents' makes a strong case for broadening the agenda to include social justice and a model of rights-based development. This would protect vulnerable populations that are most affected by climate change but are also custodians of the environment. In much the same way, protecting the rights of indigenous peoples is seen as key to preserving rainforests and biodiversity.

"We keep the environment in balance," agreed Jai Prakash Chowdhury, a recycler from Delhi during a press conference last week at Copenhagen. Mr Chowdhury is one of the founders of Safai Sena, an association of some 10,000 recyclers supported by Chintan.

Around 150,000 waste-pickers depend on recycling in Delhi and dispose of almost two thousand tons of solid waste a day. But the work is dangerous and unhealthy. Many waste-pickers lack legal status and are routinely arrested, attacked and abused. Mr Chowdhury said that recyclers earn as little as \$2 a day.

The report's key finding looks at four materials - glass, paper, metal and plastics - and uses a methodology developed by the US Environmental Protection Agency to estimate the carbon produced during the life cycle of the materials, from production to disposal. It then multiplies this by the amount recycled and comes up with the figure of 962,133 tons, making adjustments for the Indian context.

The research was directed by [Ted Mathys](#), a graduate student at the Fletcher School of Tufts University, one of two AP Peace Fellows to volunteer at Chintan this summer.

The report comes at a key moment in the Copenhagen negotiations, which is trying to reduce global CO2 emissions without putting a brake on development in the Global South. Most countries favor setting a target for reducing CO2, which could range up to 250 million tons a year by 2020. Against this, a saving of a million tons a year from one Indian city would be significant.

But Chintan also hopes that the report will interest the Indian government, which is opposed to setting any targets for fear of curbing India's 9% growth rate. 'Cooling Agents' underlines the cost of this growth to Delhi, which it says, is "swimming in waste." The city generates 8,500 tons of solid waste a day, but less than half is picked up by trucks. Only three landfills are currently open.

The report also underscores the connection between waste and climate change. Landfills give out methane gas, a potent greenhouse gas. Waste accounts for 6% of India's carbon emissions.

At the urging of Chintan, the Indian government has acknowledged recycling in the 2008 Climate National Action Plan. But Bharati Chaturvedi, the director of Chintan, argued that the Indian authorities must now translate this into concrete measures, by better protecting waste-pickers, licensing small junk dealers, issuing contracts to community recycling, and providing space for the separation of recyclable material.

Ms Chaturvedi also criticized the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for provisionally offering carbon credits to a future waste project in Delhi, the Timarpur-Okhla Plant, which expects to reduce CO2 emissions by 263,000 tons a year. This is less than a third the amount of CO2 saved by community recycling in Delhi. Moreover, says Chintan, the plant will compete directly for recyclable materials with waste-pickers.

- Read [the summary](#) of the report 'Cooling Agents'
- Read the [full report](#)
- [Meet 20 waste-pickers](#) from Delhi on YouTube
- Learn more about [Chintan](#)
- Read the blogs of of 2009 Peace Fellows [Jacqui Kotyk](#) and [Ted Mathys](#)
- [See photos of waste-pickers](#) by 2008 Peace Fellow [MacKenzie Berg](#)