

Green Maha Kumbh a departure from the past: Several measures in place to make event big on sustainability

The mela management has also deployed over 10,000 cleaning staff, divided into 850 teams, while close to 150,000 toilets and urinals have been set up, along with 25,000 dustbins (with liner bags), and 40 compactor trucks for waste management.

Written by [Garima Sadhwani](#)

January 12, 2025 06:30 IST



The Kumbh Mela in 2019 was hardly better in terms of waste management. (PTI)

No plastic, only biodegradable products, solar power, eco-friendly transport, sewage monitoring... this year's Maha Kumbh will be big on sustainability, in tune with the Union government's announcement of a 'green' mela.

Vivek Chaturvedi, additional district magistrate of Maha Kumbh, told FE, "We are planting three lakh saplings to make Prayagraj a green city. We are refraining from using plastic in the mela area. Instead, we are relying on kulhad, dona, and pattals, which are biodegradable materials, to replace thermocol and plastic."

The mela management has also deployed over 10,000 cleaning staff, divided into 850 teams, while close to 150,000 toilets and urinals have been set up, along with 25,000 dustbins (with liner bags), and 40 compactor trucks for waste management.

To also cut down on vehicular pollution, the Prayagraj Mela Authority has come up with an online e-rickshaw and e-auto booking system to encourage the use of shared and eco-friendly public transportation.

Other than this, three temporary sewage treatment plants (STP) are being set up, along with use of solar power and promoting use of reusable materials.

The mela will also have a 'one bag, one thali' drive, a volunteer-led initiative to make the gathering a low waste generator, wherein 1.5 million steel plates and 2 million cloth bags will be distributed among devotees.

This hasn't been the case always though. In 2013, when the last edition of the Maha Kumbh was held, news headlines highlighted how one of the largest human gatherings in the world left behind heaps of garbage, and an even more polluted river in its aftermath.

Post the fair, a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General had found there was inadequate handling of waste and pollution management—no additional infrastructure was built and no effective monitoring mechanisms were put in place that led to the city and river being severely polluted.

The Kumbh Mela in 2019 was hardly better in terms of waste management. The religious gathering generated 18,000 metric tonne of solid waste, which was transported to the Baswar Sewage Management Plant, a few kilometres away from the city. However, the plant had been non-functional since 2018 and was unable to process any of the waste. The National Green Tribunal (NGT), at the time, chided the state government saying this was "the grossest violation of the orders of NGT and Solid Waste Management rules, 2016. The solid waste is lying in open, untreated and uncovered."

This time, though, things are looking different. Chaturvedi said, "We have done lots of community participation work, including workshops with schoolchildren to sensitise them regarding the non-use of plastic. We've also deployed safai karamcharis and people for hand picking garbage. Dustbins with liner bags are also kept in ample quantities."

Masood Mallick, managing director and CEO of Re Sustainability, a sustainability solutions provider headquartered in Hyderabad, while applauding the initiatives, suggests that "making the Maha Kumbh a zero-carbon event by way of sponsored carbon offset projects could help significantly".

Challenges, of course, persist. The NGT's principal bench has ordered the state government and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to ensure that untreated sewage or grey water is not allowed to enter the Ganga or Yamuna rivers. Especially since sewage generation is expected to increase phenomenally during the event. On important bath days, over 16 million litres of faecal sludge, 240 million litres of greywater will be generated.

With an event of this scale, the average demand of potable water during peak days will be over 450 megalitres per day (MLD), while Prayagraj's water supply capacity is close to 350 MLD. To meet the excessive demand, the authority has dug 85 tubewells, which would be powered by 30 generators.

Komal Agarwal, associate director of urban infrastructure and tourism at IPE Global, an international development consulting firm, commented: "Ensuring hygienic conditions while managing 200-500 tonne of daily waste generated by crores of people will be a humongous task. During Maha Kumbh, with an expected influx of people to be almost twice as high as the 2019 Mela, bio-chemical oxygen demand values will only increase, degrading the quality of river water immensely."

Agarwal added: "Estimates suggest that transportation-related carbon emissions during the Kumbh can exceed 2.5 million metric tonne, contributing heavily to air pollution."