

No awareness among sanitary workers on safety gear

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Coimbatore: The city civic body has spent Rs 36 lakh to purchase gloves, masks, coats and caps for sanitary workers. They do this once in six months but various activists, sanitary workers and sanitary officers stated that a huge percentage of it is not put to use due to lack of awareness.

They also complained that the safety equipment were not of good quality. "The gloves hardly last a month and we are given just one pair. Sometimes, in a week's time, the masks and gloves get worn out," said a sanitary worker.

As per Selvaraj, a city based activist who fights against manual scavenging, the civic body spends huge amounts of money in purchasing these safety gear. "But they do not take any steps to create awareness. They can easily ensure that the workers leave the ward office only with gloves. But hardly, any steps are taken," he said. As per a sanitary officer, the quality of the equipment has improved over the years. "In comparison to previous years, the purchases made this year are much better. Generally, the gloves and coats would get torn in a week's time. But these at least last a month," said the officer.

A sanitary worker in West zone said that his mask was torn the same day they gave it to him. "Sometimes, they do not replace the damaged," he said. Another worker said that since only one pair is given, they need to wash it every day. "At least if they give us two pairs, we can use them alternatively," said the worker. Another worker said that the boots they were given were extremely uncomfortable. "They are knee length and very uncomfortable," said the worker.

But many senior health officers said the quality of the products were good. "Most workers make excuses to not wear the gloves and masks. Many say it makes them sweat and some find it uncomfortable. Awareness is a key issue and we conduct various workshops for them," said a senior officer. Corporation commissioner, K Vijaya Karthikeyan said he had held many meetings and had taken suggestions from the sanitary workers. "They wanted surgical type gloves and many sought two pairs of clothes. We will ensure that they get it this time," he said.