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UCIL site contamination a threat

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BHOPAL: Madhya Pradesh government had asked Hyderabad-based Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) to focus on dismantling of abandoned Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, claimed **Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)** representative, here on Thursday.

"The terms of reference given by the state government to IICT asked the institute to focus on dismantling of Union Carbide plant, said CSE representatives here on Thursday.

In 2010, the IICT had recommended to detoxify, decommission and dismantle production units. For this, it had prepared a technical and tender document.

"IICT has accepted that the factory can be made free of toxins. Dismantling would only be needed for portions in highly corroded condition," said CSE programme manager Amit Khurana during a media briefing.

However, the CSE maintained that site should be preserved as a monument in remembrance of the world's worst industrial disaster. The centre presented a meta-study on contamination in and around the abandoned Union Carbide factory in a media briefing here on Thursday. It also released a report 'action plan environmental remediation in and around Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL), Bhopal' and proposed a plan for environmental remediation in and around UCIL.

CSE representatives said they analyzed about 15 studies conducted over the last three decades to assess soil and groundwater contamination in and around the UCIL site. CSE had conducted one of the studies. The analysis was done during a two-day expert round table which was held in Delhi in April. CSE said the state government did not participate in the discussion. It had a representation from the Union ministry of health, ministry of environment and forests and member secretary and experts from Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

"It was perhaps for the first time in three decades that nearly all groups and organizations, who have a stake in issues related to Bhopal gas tragedy came together to formulate a strategy for waste disposal and remediation plan," said CSE deputy director general Chandra Bhushan. However, CSE study did not ascertain the amount of toxic waste within UCIL and cost of clean-up, for which it presented a five-year plan to clean UCIL site.

CSE representatives said the report draws on an action plan with two immediate, medium and long-term goals. Immediate measures include securing the site to prevent human contact with toxic chemicals and protecting annual surface water runoff from the site during monsoon.

Long initiatives include excavation and recovery of all waste from the site, characterization and inventorization of the collected waste for proper treatment and disposal, said a CSE representative.

New Delhi-based research and advocacy body CSE said the abandoned factory is filled with dangerous cocktail of chemicals and almost three decades after the Bhopal gas leak which killed hundreds and injured thousands and poses a clear and present danger to people of Bhopal.

With Union government already setting apart Rs 310 crore, Bhushan said, "We won't wait for DOW to pay for the clean-up." CSE stand was contrary to demand from local NGO working

for Bhopal gas victims, who insist the Dow Chemical company (which owns UCIL) to pay for clean and enhanced compensation.

Looking beyond the focus of incineration of 348 MT of toxic waste above the ground UCIL, CSE representatives reminded that there is more toxic contamination in 32 acres which is not being debated. "The bigger challenge is to decontaminate the soil and groundwater," he added.