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NGT clears PET bottles for pharma packaging

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PET is a clear, strong, safe, lightweight and completely recyclable plastic belonging to the polyester family



National Green Tribunal's (NGT) recent order declaring PET bottles' use safe for packaging of pharmaceuticals has finally given a rubber stamp on a scientific fact, endorsed by both the government, scientific community and the pharmaceutical industry.

An especially designed plastic - polyethylene terephthalate or PET is widely used for packaging water, medicines, beverages, edible oil, etc across the world because of its safety, utility and economic viability for the packaging of products of mass consumption. PET is a clear, strong, safe, lightweight and completely recyclable plastic belonging to the polyester family.

Recently, the principal bench of National Green Tribunal dismissed a litigation filed by Him, Jagriti Uttaranchal Welfare Society in 2014 stating that Indian government has already ensured guidelines for safe and regulated use of plastics for packaging and as the industry is adhering to global guidelines formulated under Pharmacopeia no further legislation changes are required.

The order comes after an expert committee set up by the Health Ministry in 2015, led by former biotech secretary Dr MK Bhan, submitted a report to the tribunal stating, “There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that use of PET or additive like antimony for pharmaceutical packaging may leach substances beyond limits that pose threat to human health.”

“The Covid-19 pandemic has re-established the importance of PET, with its ubiquitous presence as the packaging for the multitude of sanitizers, blood collection tubes, food containers, water bottles, Ayurvedic *kadhas* (concentrates), nutraceuticals, etc. PET saves invaluable natural resources being able to recycling and reuse. Its lightweight characteristic makes it friendly for take-away foods, travel and relief work and serves as a good ancillary in the fight against communicable diseases. So, this NGT order comes in at the right time to affirm that PET is safe. PET clearly is an inseparable packaging of several products,” says Dr Rao VSV Vadlamudi, Former President, Indian Pharmaceutical Association.

Sachin Sharma, Director, GEM Recycling states, “The safety of PET has been repeatedly demonstrated through extensive studies, regulatory approvals and scientific testing, as well as its widespread use and acceptance for more than three decades. The order must pave way for strengthening regulatory guidelines by prescribing specific methods for disposal of pharmaceutical packaging wastes.”