

2019

CYCLATHON – RIDE AGAINST POLLUTION

Report of event conducted in June, 2019

Abstract: The event followed the theme of world environment day, 2019 – Air Pollution. Growing trees is a big step that we all need to take but at the same time, we need to maintain the current level of toxicity and not increase it further. Instead of using motor vehicles and being a part of the problem, why not cycle and create a solution.

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CONCEPT NOTE

One of our most precious resources is often taken for granted and invisible unless it becomes visible. I am talking about air. We don't give the air around us much thought in our daily lives, except when it becomes unbearable to breathe due to fumes or other causes of air pollution. Or, if it becomes too scarce.

This year's World Environment Day is putting a spotlight on fighting air pollution. The National Geographic Magazine describes air pollution as a "mix of particles and gases that can reach harmful concentrations both outside and indoors. Its effects can range from higher disease risks to rising temperatures." Examples of pollutants are smoke, mold, pollen, methane, and carbon dioxide.

Every year approximately seven million people die from air pollution, according to the World Health Organization. Research has linked air pollution as the cause of cancer, heart disease, stroke, and respiratory diseases such as asthma. Especially children are affected. Breathing dirty air can slow the mental development of children and cause wide-ranging health problems. Even worse, air pollution is 10 percent of the cause of death among children. Just looking at the U.S., more than 40 percent of Americans are at risk of disease and premature death due to air pollution, according to the American Lung Association.

The impact of air pollution on our health is often underestimated in the context of climate change. Extreme weather incidents and natural disasters, such as heat waves and wildfires, increase greenhouse gases. They not only pollute the air we breathe; they also bring our ecosystem out of balance—with dire consequences, such as the spread of new diseases.

While some causes of air pollution, such as natural disasters, are hard to predict and to prevent, there are steps that individuals and businesses can take to help reduce air pollution. At the core is the reduction of our carbon footprint. We have to be more aware of the impact of our individual lifestyle choices on the overall society. Everyone can help reduce air pollution by reducing their own carbon footprint.

Public awareness about air pollution and climate change, as well as individual engagement, are important to help meet regional and global carbon footprint reduction goals.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Cyclathon was to:

1. To encourage people not to use motor vehicles for short distances. Walking or using cycle to commute would be good for health as well as the environment.
2. To spread awareness regarding the growing air pollution and to find out what their ideas were on the topic
3. To interact with people of all ages to find out how much they knew about the environment day and the

PRELIMINARY PREPARATIONS

- Did a basic research on the present theme of world environment day and the statistics involving air pollution in various countries.
- Encouraged people to cycle to India Gate for the event.
- Decided the plan of action and places to stop during the trip

CONDUCTING THE EVENT

On the World Environment Day – 5th June, 2019, I conducted a cyclathon from Pitampura to India Gate, Telengana Bhavan and then to a nearby Park.

Although it has a lot of significance, the World Environment Day is easily forgotten in the daily hustle bustle. Thus, I along with 3 other people decided to do a cyclathon to encourage people to use cycles instead of motor vehicles.

The trip was about 50 km and not many people were willing to participate and had various reasons to do so. Not being discouraged about the same, I along with my father and school friends decided to undertake the project.

The ride was full of challenges in itself. The main destination was India Gate and the war memorial that had been recently made nearby.

As There weren't many people around at that time, we went to Telengana Bhavan for breakfast and then to our new destination to conduct the event. So, we took the longer route ahead and went to Japanese Park as we anticipated there would be a lot of people over there who would be willing to participate and interact with us.

We had a set of questions that we decided to ask people of every age group in the park as we would have a diversity of the target population. It was a perfect setting as there would be many energetic health conscious people who might actually implement the suggestions.

Majorly, our interaction started with the fact whether they knew what day was today? Except it being Eid or a Wednesday. It was interesting to see their responses. When they knew what we were here about, we started with telling them about the basic facts and figures surrounding this year's theme.

Air Pollution

They were about the air quality Index in Delhi, India and the world, plastic waste, harmful and everlasting effects of plastics, about how the present condition can be improved because none of us would want to live in a place where we have to wear masks all day long and have to resort to oxygen cylinders to sustain ourselves.

RESPONSES

The response that we got from people was quite complacent. Only one person, a girl of around 9 years of age was able to tell that today was the World Environment day. The rest responded with saying that it was a Wednesday or Eid at the most.

They listened to the facts quite intently and agreed to the fact that if the number of vehicles reduced then, there was a chance to reduce air pollution. We also discussed how the same could be improved.

Some people whom we interacted with did not think that the use of plastics had increased and was harmful anymore. They thought that it was like a necessity. It clearly showed the lack of knowledge of regarding the hazardous effects of plastic and even the water kept in plastic bottles to the human body and animals due to poor disposal.

There were various suggestions that they gave us and we did a two way learning. Instead of just listening and agreeing to us, they presented us with their views which helped to make the even successful.

SUGGESTIONS

After conducting the event. I could come up with the following suggestions which include my opinion as well as the opinion of the people we interacted with.

1. Always use dustbins to throw away the waste. If no dustbin is available, then keep the waste with you and dispose it off only at an appropriate place.
2. Separate the dry waste from the moist/liquid waste/Biodegradable waste so that it can be used to make manure.
3. Have a pit made in the locality where the community can dispose off the biodegradable waste so that manure can be made which can then be used to nourish the trees and plant new ones
4. Avoid plastic bags. Carry your own bag or take only those bags from the shops which are made of paper or other bio degradable material.
5. The step must be for even the smallest plastic, eg. When we buy coconut, plastic straws are given to us. They are not discarded properly by the vendor and can be harmful for the environment. So, in order to solve, it there can be 3 course of action. The first one would be to encourage the vendors to use bamboo straws instead of plastic ones, or we can carry wooden or steel straws with us in handy and the third one as not to throw the plastic straw but to keep it
6. 3R's – Reduce, Recycle Reuse.
7. Use cycles to go to distances below 10km. Children can use it a mode of commutation to schools or tuitions. Even adults can go to offices on cycle for the same.
8. Use public transports as much as possible.

FUTURE PLAN OF ACTION

Such events should be conducted in the future as well as people are more encouraged to participate and actually implement the event when we show them that we practice what we preach. Because we were on our cycles and then asked people to do the same, we were not being hypocrites.

Also, it cannot be assumed that just because of the interaction, people would actually implement the same. Thus continuous awareness with personal examples and stories need to be shared to have a major impact.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it was a great event that also served as an eye opener. Although people agreed to what we said and had a basic idea of how we were harming our own planet, they were all acting subconsciously following what others did without a thought to the consequences.

It was seen that many used plastics and it was their denial that delhi is still not free of it even though laws have been made against it. In all, it was a great event that I got to organize that helped both, our health as well as our environment.

(The photographs have been attached as Annexure 1)

ANNEXURE - I





