

BRIEF ON KASUR TANNERY POLLUTION CONTROL PROJECT

BACKGROUND:

The Government of Pakistan and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) signed the Kasur Tannery Pollution Control Project document in January 1996 with United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) being the implementing agency for technical assistance. UNDP allocated US\$ 2.5 million, whereas the local input was Rs. 199 million. The Project intended to contain and reduce the environmental degradation caused by tannery waste; to improve the tanners technical and managerial skills; to promote environmental awareness among the population, thus improving their overall living and working conditions and creating an environmentally sustainable tanning industry in Kasur. The project was conceived to deal with stagnant pools evacuation, providing effluent drainage and collection system, constructing common effluent pre treatment plant and sanitary landfill for solid waste disposal, and, incorporating in-house waste minimizing measures such as low-waste leather processing, chromium recovery and occupational health improvement.

THE ISSUE:

The leather sector in Pakistan is one of the largest foreign exchange earners generating some Rs. 13,000 million in FY 95/96. The tanning industry is concentrated in Korangi (near Karachi), Kasur, Lahore, Sahiwal, Multan, Gujranwala and Sialkot. The town of Kasur is located 55 kilometers southeast of Lahore near the Indian border in the province of Punjab and has become well known for the pollution problems caused by the discharge of large volumes of untreated tannery wastes. In Kasur the tannery industry is mainly responsible for bread and butter for the major portion of the local population which is now estimated to about 0.3 millions. Originally there were about 180 tanneries; the figure has now gone up to over 200.

As a result of tanning activities about 9,000 cubic meter of heavily polluted waste water is being discharged besides dumping of about 150 tons solid tannery waste here and there on daily basis. The outcome was stagnant pools covering an area of 327 acres on permanent basis with about 311 acres of fertile land affected during the monsoon period. This resulted in over all degradation of the environment of the area posing serious threat to human health being directly exposed to unhygienic conditions, drinking of contaminated ground water and indirectly through the effects of chemically polluted water on growth of crops, yield, output from the animals and their health. The environmental conditions in Kasur hence were detrimental to the health and well being of the inhabitants, the tanneries workers, and the farmers. Considering the importance of environmental and health hazards and the occupational health and safety problems in Kasur, UNDP initiated the Kasur Tanneries Pollution Control project in collaboration with the Government of Pakistan, Government of Punjab and the operators of tanneries.

PRESENT STATUS:

The project has now successfully been completed. As of today the conventional waste water treatment plant with the capacity to treat 13000 cubic meter/ day is operative, the solid waste disposal site has been constructed, the pilot chrome recovery plant has been established. The stagnant pools have now been disappeared and approximately 60 ha of land have been reclaimed. The inhabitants of the concerned areas now benefit directly from the expected improvement and from the significant reduction of hazardous material in the surroundings.