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FECAL SLUDGE MANAGEMENT New Challenges

As the population grows in urban centers and areas of open defecation shrink, new challenges have appeared in fecal sludge management

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If urban dwellers are asked where the sludge and water flushed from their toilets go, many of them might not know the answer. Similarly, if a question is asked to rural villagers how they will manage the wastes from their septic tank in the future, they might not know the answer either.

A majority of city dwellers know that connecting their toilets with the sewerage is the answer to be clean. An overwhelming number of rural people are taught that the construction of toilets and declaring open defecation free villages are the solution to their waste management problems.

However, this is not all true. Connecting the urban toilets with the sewerage system has already polluted the water of rivers in Kathmandu valley and other cities. Similarly, there has always been one or the other problem in emptying the fecal storage of the septic tanks in rural households.

As new problems in sludge management are emerging, the Society of Public Health Engineers, Nepal (SOPHEN), in association with Department of Water Supply and Sewerage, organized a workshop to look for the ways out.

At the workshop, inaugurated by Secretary at the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Bhim Prasad Upadhyaya, experts working in the area, government officials and community members discussed the various aspects of the faecal sludge management (FSM) issue.

Experts also discussed FSM issue in urban areas, institutional and regulatory framework, services, technologies and enforcement aspects. Former minister of Science, Technology and Environment Ganesh Shah chaired the function.

At the event, supported by SNV, Nepal, experts and regulatory authorities expressed a grave concern over the current trend of fecal sludge management in the urban and rural areas.

With a population of over 5.5 million, Kathmandu valley does not have any treatment plant to treat the polluted water. People are connecting their toilets with the sewerage to release the dirty water and sludge. The city sewerage system directly releases all the dirt into the rivers. The only functional Guhyeshwori sewerage treatment plant is unable to treat the dirty water.

As the urban houses continue to connect their toilets with the sewers, the rural people do not know how to manage the fecal storage in the safety tank.

“Since we have technology and expertise, Nepal can manage the faecal sludge. However, the challenge before us is to solve them,” said secretary Upadhyaya.

As 87 percent of Nepal has already been declared as open defecation free areas, the people in the areas do not know how to manage faecal sludge or recycle it for other purposes. Some argue that the recycled faecal sludge can substitute the chemical fertilizer coming from India.

“We have already declared a large number of villages as Open Defecation Free (ODF). However, the challenge before us now is how to ensure fecal sludge management and treatment,” said Tej Raj Bhatt, Director General Department of Water, Sewerage and Sanitation. “The Department is currently working with different stakeholders to find out the solution. The government has already announced plans to construct the sewerage treatment centers in four places in the valley and we are now studying the FSM in the rural areas.”

Presenting a paper, 'Situation in Nepal: Existing roles and responsibility, Standards and Guidelines', Wash Governance Specialist Sanjaya Adhikary highlighted the current state of institutional arrangements.

“There are standards and institutional arrangements for the FSM. However, there is a lack of coordination among different stakeholders,” said Adhikary. “Look at the case of Kathmandu, people are releasing all the wastes to the rivers. Despite the provision and standard, no one is caring as there is no way for them.”

With over 60,000 manholes in Kathmandu, there is no system map to identify where the sewer comes and goes. Even some private sector companies involved in FSM are dumping the dirty water collected from septic tank to the nearby manhole.

“We are ready to provide the needed support to Nepal in FSM,” said Jukka, from Finnish Embassy. “There are technologies available to treat the sewerage.”

“We organized the workshop realizing the importance of FSM in changing context,” said Ramdeep Singh, chairman of SOPHEN.

As areas covering ODF increase and urban areas expand, FSM is going to be a major problem in the coming days. In this context, SOPHEN’s effort to bring the issue to discussion is welcome.

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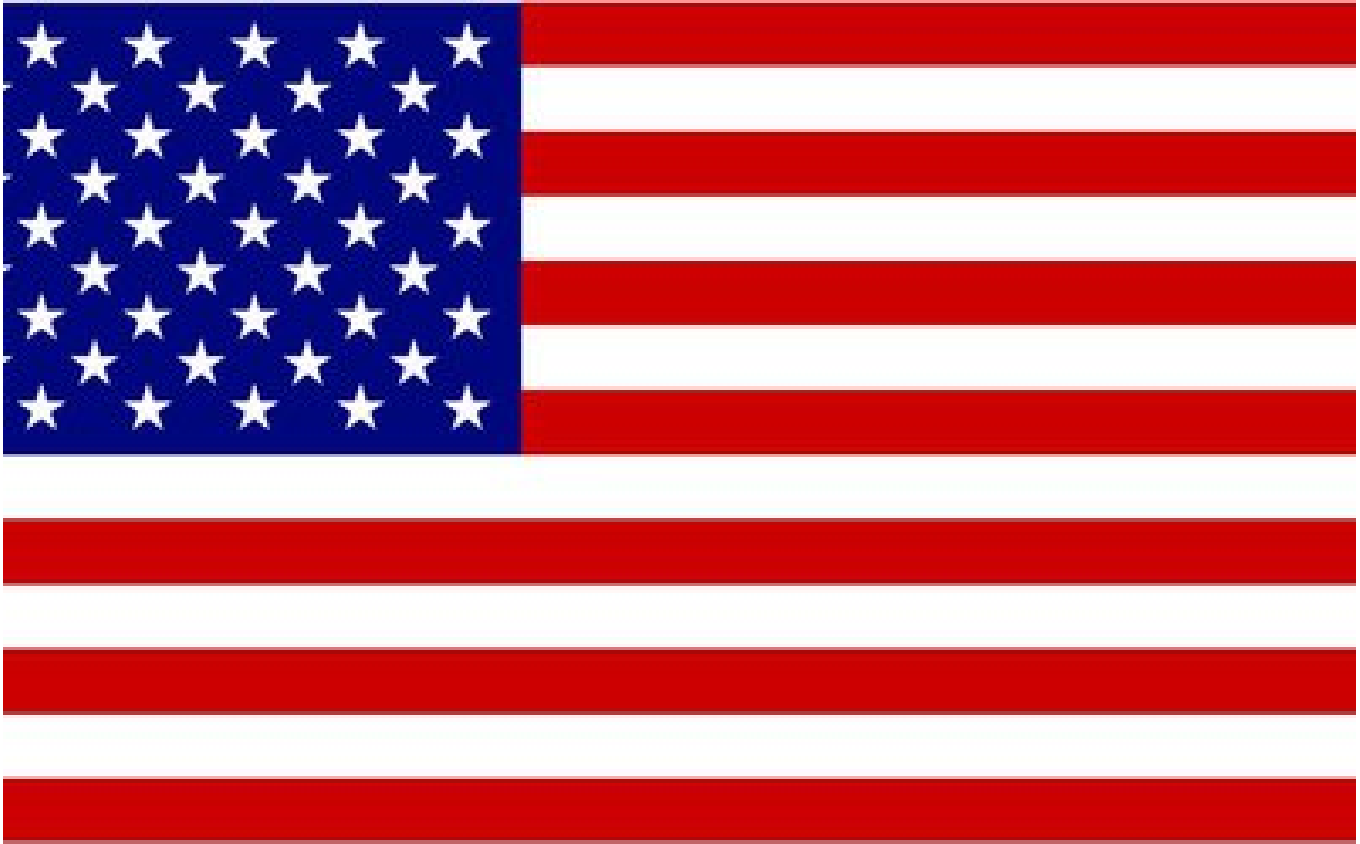
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