

Safe Festival Campaign: Holi 2012



Holi is a religious festival of colors celebrated in India every year in the spring season, to mark the triumph of 'good' over 'bad'. It is celebrated by Hindus, more widely in the northern region than in southern India. *Holi* has been named differently in different parts of the country and is celebrated on different days and in different ways in the mountains and lowlands of India. It is a national holiday when the entire nation is smeared in different shades of the most vibrant, scented colors – both wet (colored water) and dry (powdered colors) varieties. It is an eagerly awaited festival for its freedom to indulge oneself in boundless joy and fun-filled activities with family, friends and even strangers! It is one of the several major festivals of India that brings together people from different walks of life and fills their lives with colors and excitement. *Holi*, this year, was celebrated in early February.

While *Holi* signifies everything colorful and joyous, it is unfortunately, also harmful due to the toxic elements present in the colors. These include copper sulphate, aluminium bromide, chromium iodide, mercury sulphide, glass particles and lead oxide. These harmful chemicals can lead to various health issues such as permanent blindness, minamata disease, cancer, skin diseases, respiratory diseases etc.

Recognising the dangerous effects of *Holi* colors, the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) is trying to promote the use of 'safe', herbal colours / dyes derived from natural sources such as coffee beans for the color brown, turmeric for yellow, beetroot for magenta, *palash* flower for orange and tree leaves for the color green. CEE launched a nation-wide 'Safe Festival - *Holi*' campaign through its *Paryavaran Mitra* network. The campaign promoted the use of homemade, herbal, powdered colors and discouraged children and their families from using chemical colors, wasting water and using wood for large bonfires.

RCE Srinagar initiated this campaign in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Ladakh and Jammu provinces of the State of Jammu & Kashmir.

Over 250 students participated in the 'Safe Festival - *Holi*' campaign in Uttarakhand. Swami Parmanand School, Joshimath, set up stalls for two days to sell herbal colours within the school premises to students, teachers and local villagers, prior to the festival. Baba Bharti High School, Rishikesh, organized awareness programs for students to help them learn techniques about recycling waste plastic bottles, paper and sticks to make *Pichkaris* (water pistols). Lala Lajpat Rai Junior High School, Tehri Garhwal, organized street plays with songs on 'Safe *Holi*' as part of traditional *Baithki Holi* songs which is unique to the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. These efforts were aimed at helping communities realize the importance and safety in celebrating *Holi* in traditional ways.

Similar efforts were also made at Doon Valley School, KVN School, Maharaja Junior High School and Genius Public School in Sirmour district of Himachal Pradesh. Over 180 children pledged to use *Gulal* (dry, powdered colors), which would save almost a bucket of water per student. They also persuaded their families and communities to

use dry colors and save water. Moreover, student volunteers discouraged villagers from bathing in the village pond after playing *Holi* so as to protect it from pollution. In addition, the students urged villagers not to consume liquor (an integral part of *Holi* celebrations) in order to avoid any untoward incidents. Around 10 volunteers were posted at the holy shrine of *Poanta Sahib* on the banks of *Yamuna* to encourage people to celebrate *Holi* the traditional way. RCE Srinagar, with its partners, will carry forward this initiative to make future celebrations safe, fun-filled and environment friendly.

Besides colours, organic food, seasonal and homemade eatables, traditional environment friendly practices are also being popularized and promoted. These will help conserve biodiversity and protect the environment.



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