

## UNEP/GPA NEWS FORUM

---

### GUJARAT — SHIP-BREAKING AND COASTAL POLLUTION

Ship-breaking is an important activity along the west coast of India, especially in Gujarat, the state with the longest coastline. Alang, a small coastal town in Gujarat, houses the world's largest ship-breaking yard. Forty-five thousand workers break down about 200 ships in this yard each year. This produces 2.6 million tons of scrap steel per year, equivalent to 15 percent of the country's total steel production.

The ship-breaking industry creates numerous hazards for the coastal and marine environment. Ship-breaking releases a large number of dangerous pollutants, including toxic waste, oil, polychlorinated biphenyls, and heavy metals, into the waters and seabed. While most of the oil is removed before a ship is scrapped, sand used to mop up the remaining oil is thrown into the sea. High concentrations of oil and grease are then found in the coastal waters, choking marine life. Solid waste strewn on the shore, 45 tonnes on any given day according to a study by the Central Pollution Control Board, also finds its way into the sea. Adding to the stress on coastal waters, the organic load from the thousands of workers living in cramped conditions with little or no sanitary facilities results in unacceptably high levels of BOD<sup>1</sup>.

Campaigners led by Greenpeace, the Basel Action Network, and the International Transport Workers' Federation have joined forces with Indian trade unions and local environmentalists in efforts to reduce the detrimental impacts of the ship-breaking industry on both human and marine ecosystem health. The Indian government is being urged to demand the decontamination of ships prior to their arrival on India's shores for scrapping, and to develop and enforce adequate measures to prevent further environmental degradation. Mark Dickinson of the International Transport Workers' Federation has called on the International Maritime Organization to "take the lead to ensure that owners are held liable for their ship's disposal and that ships are decontaminated prior to export to industrialising countries. We will push for this by involving the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme."<sup>2</sup>

The government and governmental agencies are taking steps to address the environmental impacts of the ship-breaking industry. On 7 January 2000, the Union Ministry of Labour asked the Centre for Science and Environment, a non-governmental organization based in New Delhi, to submit its own set of observations and recommendations about the safety and environmental problems at Alang.<sup>3</sup> The Gujarat Maritime Board (the state agency responsible for regulating ship-breaking in Gujarat), in collaboration with the Iron Steel Scrap and Shipbreakers Association of India, the Gujarat Ship-breakers Association, and others, held an international workshop on "Challenges to the Ship Recycling Industry: Environment and Safety" earlier this year. Roy Chowdhury, Vice-Chairman of the Gujarat Maritime Board, stated that one of the objectives of the workshop was "to bring ship-breakers, academics, and regulatory authorities on one platform to... safeguard [the] environment," and to develop a strategy to draft more stringent regulations. The Board is in the process of drafting regulations governing the ship-breaking industry.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Tiwari, M. "Bare Facts." *Down to Earth* 6(20):29 – 33, 15 March 1998.

<sup>2</sup> "Trade Unions and Environmentalists Join Hands to Challenge Dirty Shipbreaking in Asia." 21 September 1999, <http://www.greenpeace.org/pressreleases/toxics/1999sep21.html>.

<sup>3</sup> "Damage Control." *Down to Earth* 8(18):14, 15 February 2000.

<sup>4</sup> "Erring Ship Breakers to Face Severe Penalty." *The Financial Express*, 7 February 2000, <http://www.financialexpress.com/fe/daily/20000207/fco07026.html>.