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12 tree ambulances in Delhi by 2024: MCD

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The customised vehicle carries pesticides, fungicides and insecticides, and is also equipped with a pipe and a ladder to climb trees or water them



In 2010, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) set up a tree surgery unit and a tree ambulance, which treats trees with termite infestations, diseases, and concretisation. (HT Archive)

The horticulture department of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is set to triple its fleet of tree ambulances in the Capital, taking the total up to 12 — one for each of its 12 administrative zones — by 2024, civic body officials said.

MCD's fleet of four tree ambulances came up last year in compliance with Delhi high court and National Green Tribunal (NGT) orders. According to officials, the tree ambulances this past year carried out 353 surgeries, which provided new lease of life to hollow and infected trees, a senior MCD official told HT.

In May 2022, the high court asked the three erstwhile corporations of Delhi and land-owning agencies such as Public Works Department (PWD), Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and the forest department, among others, to set up a tree diseases surgery unit, procure tree ambulances, and depute specialised arborists (tree surgeon) in each body to ensure the safety of trees in the Capital. While tree ambulances were launched, the surgery unit is yet to come up.

Hearing a plea on deconcretising trees, the court first gave the directions to erstwhile South MCD on February 14 this year, and later extended the directions to include the other agencies in an order on March 2.

What is a tree ambulance?



A vehicle put to use to treat trees with diseases, termite infestations, or those trees are tilting towards one side

5 Tree ambulances currently in Delhi

4 With MCD **1** With NDMC

12 MCD plans to triple its strength to 12

What does a tree surgery entail?

A treated tree may take 2-3 years to heal. The procedure starts with removing the infected part, cleaning it with a brush, washing it, and applying insecticide on the infested portion. Hollowed-out parts are filled with inert foam and covered with chicken mesh

What is a tree ambulance equipped with?

- 1** Guard-rails and mesh to cover a treated tree
- 2** Fungicides, pesticides, manure, insecticides, and any other chemicals required to treat a tree
- 3** A hosepipe to provide water on the spot
- 4** A ladder to help the staff climb tall trees



HOW CAN ONE UTILISE THIS SERVICE?

There is no dedicated helpline number for a tree ambulance. When a damaged or infected tree is spotted, one can contact the MCD horticulture department at mcd-ithelpdesk@mcd.nic.in and ask for a tree ambulance

“Tree ambulances are deputed based on complaints or reports received from field staff regarding pest infested, hollow or drying trees. A normal tree surgery takes two to three years. The procedure starts with removing the infected or hollowed out part, cleaning it with a brush, washing it, and then applying insecticide on the pest infested portion,” said the official.

The hollowed-out part, the official explained, is filled with inert foam and covered with chicken mesh. “The chicken mesh is added with a layer of plaster of Paris and a thin layer of cement so that the POP doesn’t get washed away due to weather,” he added.

In 2010, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) set up a tree surgery unit and a tree ambulance, which treats trees with termite infestations, diseases, and problems caused by concretisation.

The customised vehicle carries pesticides, fungicides and insecticides, and is equipped with a pipe and a ladder to climb and water trees. By May 2022, NDMC and SDMC got a tree ambulance each.

The Greening Guidelines, 2000, by the Union ministry of housing and urban affairs, mandate corporations and other land-owning agencies to have a tree diseases surgery unit alongside a tree ambulance, but none was set up by MCD in the city in the last 20 years.

In 2007, too, the high court directed the three corporations to set up tree disease units but the corporations failed to act on the order.

MCD started a 15-day tree census on December 13 in the Capital, in which the concretisation status and data on diseased or hollow trees is being collected, the official quoted above said.

Vallari Sheel, an urban ecologist who carried out a tree census in Vasant Vihar in 2016, found out that nearly 70%-80% trees were “unhealthy” -- either concretised, damaged, looping to one side, or diseased.

“In most cases, there are small infections, which are either fungal infection or caused by an insect attack. This usually happens when the tree is damaged -- by nails, wires wrapped around it or its bent towards one side. Tree ambulances can help fix all this,” said Sheel.

Once the Vasant Vihar census was done, Sheel removed signboards and nails from tree trunks, and used sprayed herbicides or insecticides to help the trees heal within weeks.

Termite infestations, she said, is generally a sign that a tree is dying. “If there’s a termite infection, it usually means the tree is dying as they only eat dead wood. If the infestation is not too deep, they can be saved.”

Sheel added that when a tree has fully dried and needs to be removed, tree ambulances should also take out the stump, and replace it with a new sapling. “Often nothing is planted back at the spot,” she said.

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