

Forest dept to start drive to free trees from hoardings, wires

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Dehradun: Days after the Uttarakhand high court issued orders to remove hoardings nailed on trees, the state forest department on Sunday launched a drive to free the city trees from such hoardings as well as electric wires and fancy lights (that are wrapped around trees). Three teams of the department were involved in the drive.

According to officials, over 300 hoardings were taken off during the drive from ornamental (silver oak, *Acaica glauca*) and fruit trees (mango) on the first day of the drive.

The drive covered the areas from Haridwar Road to Rispana, from Mussoorie Diversion to Clock Tower, and from Chakrata Road to Prem Nagar. Officials of the department said they have also decided to slap notices to those accused of putting hoardings on trees as well as putting electric wires on trees. "Putting hoardings on trees is a violation of the environmental norms. Hence, depending on the number and size of hoardings put on trees, notices seeking clarification will be sent to the accused," Mohan Singh Rawat, ranger, Malsi range, told TOI. City residents alleged that the drive took a long time coming. "We need to have a law in place to curb the practice of putting advertisement hoardings on trees and the law must impose a heavy fine on those who violate the norm," said Nitin Pandey, environmentalist, and member of city-based group Citizens for Green Doon. However, the forest department officials countered the charge of starting the drive late, claiming that such measures are undertaken regularly in the city but the department "doesn't publicise them every time."

Meanwhile, some activists seemed skeptical of the drive's success. Raizaan Ahmad, a city resident and green activist, told TOI, "The forest department is short-staffed and has other issues to look after, like forest and animal protection, forest resource management, implementation of forestry schemes etc. Hence, it would be difficult for them to carry out a routine inspection to check whether hoardings on trees are put up again." Notably, the issue of putting hoardings on trees is widespread in

Mussoorie as well. “Advertisements kill the natural beauty of hills. Tourists come to here to be in the lap of nature but these hoardings ruin the picturesque beauty of the Himalayan state,” says Anil Namdev, a Mussoorie resident.