



Are Hyderabad's Trees Protected?

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'Every tree felled is compensated for'

Protecting trees and preserving the environment should be everybody's responsibility – not the forest department's alone. Unfortunately, though, I do not see that happening. There have even been instances where people have put trees on fire, and we have had to rush our staff to the scene to save them from burning down. Whenever we get the chance, we ensure we do our best to stop the axe from falling on trees.

It is for this reason that we also follow a strict procedure. Anybody who wants to cut a tree cannot do so arbitrarily. He/she must apply through the Telangana Forest Department's website. The portal allows an individual to register his/her request, which is then verified by officials, in a very time-bound manner. Depending on how justified the reason is, permission is either given or denied. All of this happens online, in a rather transparent fashion.

Also, even if people are granted permission to fell a tree, there is a set procedure that they have to follow. To begin with, they have to pay a security deposit of Rs 450 for planting two trees or saplings. So, for each tree felled there are two trees raised. Once they plant these trees, they are also expected to show us the tree that they planted, after three years so that we know that the plant survived, and it is healthy. At that time, we return the security deposit.

If they don't have space and are unable to raise any trees, we take the responsibility of planting and raising those trees in some other place. As per the guidelines, we try to plant them within a three-km radius of that place where the tree was felled.

In Hyderabad and other urban areas, the forest department now ensures that only native trees are planted. The same is communicated to those who are given permission for felling trees and then take part in the compensatory plantation.

We have also advised the GHMC to plant native trees except in a few places where they want to take up ornamental plantation. However, in some gated communities and ventures, they don't pay attention to these rules.

We also, very proactively, react to complaints of tree felling that are brought to our notice. We take whatever remedial action is required -- impose a fine and report the issue to the media so that people are educated and made aware of the consequences of such violations.

Source:<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/are-hyderabad-trees-protected/articleshow/86591918.cms>