Sub: Change in conditions stipulated in the Environmental Clearances of Thermal Power Plants and Coal Mines in line with the Fly Ash Notification and subsequent amendments - reg.

The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006 under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 mandates the requirement of prior environmental clearance to the projects/activities listed in the schedule to the said Notification. These projects/activities have been categorized under category A or B and require appraisal/approval by the respective regulatory authorities (MoEF&CC/SEIAAs) at the Central/State level.

2. As per the provisions of the EIA Notification, 2006, read with subsequent amendments, mining of minerals is covered under Category A/B of the Schedule to the EIA Notification, 2006 based on their areal extent, and thus requiring prior environmental clearance from the concerned regulatory authority.

3. Based on the proposals submitted by the project proponent and recommendations of the sectoral Expert Appraisal Committee, mining projects and thermal power plants were granted Environmental Clearance by the Ministry/State Environment Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAAs) from time to time, subject to compliance of certain terms and conditions as environmental safeguards necessitated at that stage, which also included the condition for backfilling of mines voids, use/disposal of fly ash in low lying areas, etc.

4. In order to address the environmental concerns of fly ash and to improve its utilization, MoEF&CC has issued a Notification on 14th September, 1999 and subsequent amendments issued vide Notifications dated 27th August, 2003, 3rd November, 2009 and 25th January, 2016 from time to time.

The Fly Ash Notification issued vide S.O.2804 (E) dated 3rd November, 2009 provides for mandatory use of fly ash in the external overburden dump, backfilling or stowing of mines. The main concern is poor fly ash utilization by the pithead power plants mainly because of limited potential in cement industries/road projects and non-utilization of fly ash in stowing and overburden in coal mines.

5. An Expert Committee was constituted for developing a focussed strategy for best utilization of flyash to manufacture end products. The Committee has made recommendations for enhanced utilization of flyash in various sectors viz. mines, roads, bricks manufacturing, cement manufacturing, etc. During an Inter-ministerial consultation held on 21st January, 2019 under the Chairmanship of Secretary (EF&CC), recommendations of the Expert Committee were accepted, which inter-alia included the following:

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a) MoEF&CC should revisit the conditions stipulated in the existing environmental clearances of Thermal Power Plants for flyash utilization and modify them in consonance with the flyash notification.

b) Appropriate conditions need to be incorporated in the environmental clearances for utilization of flyash in mines backfilling/stowing.

6. The matter has been examined in the Ministry. Further, the matter has been also been referred to the EAC (Thermal Power Projects) in its meeting held on 28.5.2019 and 12.7.2019. The EAC mentioned that though the Flyash Notification, 1999 and subsequent amendments allow the unrestricted use of flyash in abandoned mines, low lying areas, soil conditioner in agriculture, there are no specific guidelines/methodology available for safe disposal of flyash so as to minimize the damage to the environment. In absence of methodology, EAC has been examining the proposals on case to case basis and recommending for disposal of flyash in abandoned mines. Further, the EAC has also expressed the concerns over the long term impacts of flyash disposal on groundwater, soil quality and impact on associated flora and fauna. Now, the guidelines for disposal of fly ash utilisation in low lying areas and mine voids have been prepared by the Central Pollution Control Board and placed before the EAC (Thermal Power and Coal Mining) in its meeting held on 12.7.2019.

7. In view of the recommendations of the EAC (Thermal Power) in its meeting held on 12.7.2019, after careful examination of the matter and to meet the objectives of the Fly Ash Notification, 1999 & its amendments, the Ministry hereby stipulates the following conditions in the existing Environmental Clearances of Thermal Power Plants and Coal mines which have valid Environmental Clearance accorded by the Ministry/SEIAA, that will replace the existing conditions (Specific & General) which prohibited the use of fly ash in abandoned mines/low lying areas/soil conditioner in agriculture:

i. The guidelines prepared by CPCB for disposal of flyash for reclamation of low lying areas and in stowing/backfilling of abandoned mines/quarries shall be followed during disposal of ash in abandoned or working mines, as annexed.

ii. There should at least be clearance of 500 m of safe distance be maintained from River and water body in case of ash disposal in abandoned mines to prevent embankment failures and flyash flowing into the nearby water body.

iii. The top layer of the flyash disposal area in the abandoned mines shall be kept moist during disposal.

iv. Top layer of the disposed area should have 70 cm overburden or gravels/stones and then 30 cm sweet soil cover. Subsequently, the vegetation shall be raised on the soil cover.

v. Bioaccumulation and bio-magnification tests shall be conducted on surrounding flora and fauna (tree leaves, vegetation, crop yields and cattle population) during pre-monsoon and post monsoon to find out any trace metals escaped through groundwater or runoff.

vi. Surface runoff and supernatant water, in any case shall not be let into the surrounding areas. It shall be collected by providing adequate drains around the mine. The supernatant water along with surface runoff shall be treated and re-used for mixing ash and plant operations.

vii. To the extent possible, only decanted water from mine, make up water from treated effluents such as cooling tower blow down and treated sewage water shall be used for making ash slurry.
Flyash to be used as soil conditioner in agriculture needs and to be applied in controlled manner to limit excessive application so as to prevent soil degradation. The optimize proportion of ash to be applied which is to be certified by the State Agricultural/Universities/Colleges based on the soil testing.

ix. Approval from DGMS shall be obtained before disposing the ash in the mine voids.

x. Technology for conversion of fly ash into coarse granules for stowing in the underground mines to be explored.

xi. All the power plants should install different silos for dry collection of flyash.

xii. Records pertaining to details of month-wise quantity of flyash disposed and water consumption along with nature/source of water shall be maintained and submitted to Ministry/Regional Office annually.

xiii. Before starting the disposal of ash into mine voids, the NOC/Permission from the mine owner is to be obtained incase the mine closure activities are not completed or State Government incase the mine has been handed over to the State Govt. after its closure. A copy of such NOC/Permission is to be submitted to the Ministry and its Regional Offices.

8. This issues with the approval of the Competent Authority.

(Dr. S. Kerketta)
Director, IA Division

To

1. The Chairman, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)
2. The Chairman/Member Secretaries all the Expert Appraisal Committees
3. The Chairman /Member Secretaries of all the SEIAAs/SEACs
4. The Chairman/Member Secretaries of all SPCBs/UTPCCs
5. All the Power Plant Operators/ Coal Mining Operators who were accorded Environmental Clearance.
6. All the ROs of MoEF&CC.
7. All the Officers of I.A. Division

Copy for information to:

1. PS to Hon’ble Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change
2. PS to Hon’ble MoS (EF&CC)
3. PPS to Secretary(EF&CC)
4. PPS to SS(AKJ) / AS (RSP)
5. Sr.PPS to JS (GM)/ JS(NK)
6. Website of MoEF&CC.