Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

You are appointed as an officer heading the section in Environment Pollution Control Board to ensure compliance and its follow-up. In that region, there were large number of small and medium industries which had been granted clearance. You learnt that these industries provide employment to many migrant workers. Most of the industrial units have got environmental clearance certificate in their possession. The environmental clearance seeks to curb industries and projects that supposedly hamper environment and living species in the region. But in practice, most of these units remain to be polluting units in several ways like air, water and soil pollution. As such, local people encountered persistent health problems.

It was confirmed that majority of the industries were violating environmental compliance. You issued notice to all the industrial units to apply for fresh environmental clearance certificate from the competent authority. However, your action met with hostile response from a section of the industrial units, other vested interest persons and a section of the local politicians. The workers also became very hostile to you as they felt that your action would lead to the closure of these industrial units, and the resultant unemployment will lead to insecurity and uncertainty in their livelihood. Many owners of the industries approached you with the plea that you should not initiate harsh action as it would compel them to close

their units, and cause huge financial loss, shortage of their products in the market. These would obviously add to the sufferings of the labourers and the consumers alike. The labour union also sent you representation requesting against the closure of the units. You simultaneously started receiving threats from unknown corners. You however received supports from some of your colleagues, who advised you to act freely to ensure environmental compliance. Local NGOs also came to your support and they demanded the closure of the polluting units immediately.

- **(a) What are the options available to you under the given situation?**
- **(b) Critically examine the options listed by you.**
- **(c) What type of mechanism would you suggest to ensure environmental compliance?**
- **(d) What are the ethical dilemmas you faced in exercising your option?**

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2022	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

(a) Options Available: Ignore violations, immediately close all polluting units, or adopt phased and legally enforceable compliance measures with strict action against serious violators.

(b) Critical Evaluation: Ignoring violations endangers public health and ecology. Blanket closure may cause unemployment and economic disruption. Evidence-based enforcement with deadlines, monitoring, and proportionate penalties balances environmental protection with livelihood concerns.

(c) Compliance Mechanism: Independent inspections, real-time pollution monitoring, public disclosure, periodic environmental audits, grievance redressal, whistle-blower protection, and strict penalties for repeat offenders.

(d) Ethical Dilemmas: Environmental protection versus employment; public health versus industrial growth; impartial enforcement versus political pressure; compassion for workers versus accountability of polluters; personal safety versus official duty.

Model Answer

Introduction

As an officer of the Environment Pollution Control Board, my primary duty is to protect public health and ecological integrity. Existing environmental clearance cannot justify continued violations of pollution-control standards.

(a) Options Available

I may ignore violations under pressure, order immediate closure of all non-compliant units, or enforce the law through a proportionate, time-bound compliance plan while taking urgent action against serious polluters.

(b) Critical Examination

Ignore Violations: This may temporarily protect jobs and industrial output but sacrifices public health, environmental sustainability, and the rule of law.

Close All Units Immediately: This may stop pollution quickly but could cause widespread unemployment and economic hardship, particularly where violations can be corrected without permanent closure.

Phased Enforcement: Issue legally valid directions, require corrective action within defined deadlines, and impose penalties or closure where warranted. This balances environmental justice with workers' livelihood, while ensuring that serious or imminent threats are addressed immediately.

(c) Mechanism for Environmental Compliance

Establish regular independent inspections, third-party environmental audits, continuous emission and effluent monitoring, and public disclosure of compliance data. Strengthen grievance redressal, community

participation, interdepartmental coordination, and whistle-blower protection. Apply escalating penalties and closure orders to persistent violators, consistent with law.

(d) Ethical Dilemmas

I face environmental protection versus employment, public health versus economic growth, impartiality versus political pressure, compassion versus enforcement, and personal safety versus professional duty.

Conclusion

I would pursue firm, transparent, and proportionate enforcement, protecting communities from serious pollution while allowing compliant industries to operate. Environmental governance must uphold the rule of law without treating workers as responsible for their employers' violations.

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