

Harnessing pine needles to make coal for fuel

MAKING MONEY A group of 16 women of Nahan village first thought of this idea to become self-reliant as far as fuel is concerned



Members of the group with pine coal in Nahan.

HT PHOTO

Shalender Kalra

✉ letterschd@hindustantimes.com

NAHAN: The pine trees soak soil moistures, and thus, prevent other trees to grow around them; however, a self-help group Aarti Eakheeti Samuh has found a positive aspect of the pines. The self-help group is actively converting pine needles into coal, which is sold as fuel.

A group of 16 women of Bajaga village in Pachhad block first thought of this idea for self-reliance as far as fuel is concerned. There are also other trees in the area, including deodar and silver oak, but pine trees have outnumbered them.

The pine tree is called 'cheed' in local language. It is needles to say that pine leaves create a thick carpet on the forestland that prevents seeds of other plants to germinate. Blade-like leaves that fall from the pines

THE PROCESS

Around 10 kg cow dung is mixed with one quintal pine needle, the mixture then set in a machine for further mixing. After drying the mixture for 2-3 days it can be used as coal. "When 1 kg pine coal gives fire up to 60-90 minutes, 50 kg pine coal may provide fire equal to an LPG cylinder," said Jaiwanti.

in summer often trigger forest fire; thus, its removal from the forest is significant.

The group was motivated by Himachal's Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project (MHWDP) for the production of pine needles fuel. "We have been producing vermi compost earlier, but found the use of pine

needles for coal production easier and money fetching. Moreover, the use of pine needles for coal prevents forest fire, said Jaiwanti Sharma, president of the group.

She further said the pines were coloniser affecting the growth of other varieties of plants in the region. MHWDP divisional officer SR Rana said they had sent the members of the group to Uttarakhand on an exposure visit, where they found the use of pine needles for making fuel. The interest of the group was encouraging, thus basic equipment was provided to them for the purpose, said Rana.

The motivator of the group, Reena Sharma, said a fire needs three things - fuel, oxygen and heat - and pine needles could be three-in-one.

She further said proper use of pine needles might also prevent forest fires in summers.