



PLASTIC MICROBEADS

WHAT ARE PLASTIC MICROBEADS?

Polyethylene microspheres or plastic microbeads are a popular new ingredient used in over 100 different personal care products on the market today. Manufacturers use these tiny plastic microbeads as an abrasive in a wide variety of facial scrubs, soaps, cosmetics and even toothpastes.

They can range in size from one millimeter to as small as a blood cell or grain of sand. Researchers estimate that a single product can contain as many as 350,000 plastic microbeads. Once they are washed down the drain, microbeads enter into waterways where they endanger aquatic wildlife and threaten human health.

WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

Microbeads can enter into waterways through sewage overflows or by passing through municipal sewage treatment plants, which are not equipped to remove them from the waste stream. Without very expensive retrofitting, microbeads pass through treatment plants and then flow into streams, rivers, and lakes, eventually reaching Long Island Sound and the ocean. Scientists have found microplastic particles in every ocean, bay, gulf and estuary in the world. A recent study done in Lake Ontario found as many 1.1 million plastic particles floating around per square kilometer.

Once in the water, microbeads act like tiny sponges, absorbing toxins, such as poly-aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), flame retardants (e.g., PCBs), and bisphenol-A (BPA). The microbeads are often mistaken for fish eggs and eaten by small fish and aquatic wildlife. Studies show that when fish and aquatic life consume plastic, chemicals contained in the plastics can bio-accumulate in their body, meaning they can be passed up the food chain to larger fish, wildlife, and ultimately humans.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

In order to decrease plastic contaminants in its rivers, lakes and Long Island Sound, Connecticut should prohibit the import and sale of personal cosmetic products that contain plastic microbeads measured to be five millimeters or less.

Safer, cost-effective alternatives are already beginning to replace plastic microbeads in many products. Pumice, ground cocoa beans, and nutshells are natural abrasives that are truly

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PLASTIC MICROBEADS *continued*

For more information
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biodegradable and do not have the same adverse impact on wildlife as plastics. It is important that even “biodegradable” plastic microbeads be included in the ban, as they still absorb the same toxins and take at least 6 months to break apart.

In 2015, the legislature is considering a bill that will prohibit the import and sale of personal cosmetic products containing plastic Microbeads measured 5mm or less in size. Passing this measure will help protect the environment and public health in Connecticut.