



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Release

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CAP: Ban microplastics in cosmetics and personal care products

The Consumers Association of Penang calls on the authorities to ban microplastics in personal care and cosmetic products in view of the health and environmental hazards associated with these tiny plastic particles.

For the last 50 years, microparticles of plastic, or microplastics, have been used in personal care products and cosmetics, replacing natural options in a large number of cosmetic and personal care formulations.

These microplastics particles, can be as small as 1 micrometer (one millionth of a meter) to nano proportions. Microplastics are applied in a variety of leave-on and rinse-off formulations such as: deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, shower gel, lipstick, hair colouring, shaving cream, sunscreen, insect repellent, anti-wrinkle creams, moisturizers, hair spray, facial masks, baby care products, eye shadow and mascara. They are used for a variety of purposes such as sorbent phase for delivery of active ingredients, film formation, exfoliation, viscosity regulation and many others.

The size of the particulates applied depends on the function in the formulation. Many of the microplastics in cosmetics and personal care products today are between 1 and 50 micrometre in size.

Microplastics and other plastic ingredients are present in different products at different percentages, ranging from less than 1% to more than 90% in some cases. For example, a typical exfoliating shower gel (used for the removal of dead skin) can contain roughly as much microplastics in the product as it is used to make the plastic packaging it comes in.

Due to their microscopic size, these particles flow straight to the drain and into the water bodies, contributing to the alarming plastic pollution of the ocean.

A survey by CAP showed that a range of common products such as shower gel and face scrubs stated on their labels that it contained microplastics. There were also products which contained plastic compounds which are labeled as acrylates indicating that these products contained microplastics. The products which contained microplastics as an ingredient were manufactured in foreign countries. Most local products however do not have proper labels which show microplastics being used. As cosmetic products manufactured in Malaysia do not carry ingredient labeling consumers are unable to avoid products that contained microplastics.

According to the research by the United Nations Environment Programme, microplastics when washed down the drains cannot be collected for recycling, nor do they decompose in wastewater treatment facilities. These plastic particles will end up in the global ocean, where it remains and may take hundreds of years to completely degrade.

Studies indicate that microplastics particles can absorb and release highly toxic chemicals such as persistent organic pollutants like dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). These toxin-laden microplastics can be easily eaten by fish, mussels and other aquatic organisms and thus contaminating the marine food chain and posing risks to human health and the environment.

Studies have shown fish are being killed, and prevented from reaching maturity, by microplastics that enters the oceans.

Some young fish have been found to prefer these tiny particles of plastic to their natural food sources, effectively starving them before they can reproduce.

Plastic particulates entering the environment for example, via wastewater or biosolids runoff, can potentially be consumed as food by aquatic organisms and enter the food chain, another possible uptake routes is via the gills. Microplastics in the marine environment can potentially travel vast distances floating in seawater or sediment to the seabed.

These microplastics are incapable of mineralizing at measurable rates in the environment, either by biodegradation or by photo and or thermal degradation processes. Estimates of half-lives run in the hundreds of years which are longer than any persistent organic pollutant.

Microplastics besides contributing to plastic litter in the environment, also poses a complicated problem in the marine environment with incomprehensible consequences.

Actions taken by other countries

- The UK government is to introduce a ban of microplastics from all cosmetics by the end of 2017. They will be banned from sale in the UK from the end of 2017.
- Illinois became the first U.S. state to enact legislation banning the manufacture and sale of products containing microplastics the two-part ban goes into effect in 2018 and 2019.
- The Netherlands, Austria, Luxembourg, Belgium and Sweden have issued a joint call to ban the microplastics used in personal care products.

Non-government organizations in ASEAN through an online petition is calling for a regional ban of microplastics in the production of cosmetics and personal care products..

In view of the health and environmental hazards associated with microplastics. CAP calls on the authorities to prohibit the production, importation, distribution and sale of personal care and cosmetic products containing microplastics.

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