

Conservation Forum

for and by members of PGC
Sandy Menke, Conservation Chair



Are your facial scrub and toothpaste polluting the environment?

In the last few years, many of us have seen documentaries depicting the miles upon miles of plastic whirling in our oceans. It is very disturbing to see what we are doing to our beautiful world. Plastics are not biodegradable, so these cesspools contain everything from toothbrushes to medical syringes to plastic dishware. A couple of years ago, another polluter has come to environmentalists attention. Microbeads. These are plastic nanoparticles, found in toothpastes, facial cleansers, and many other products for the purpose of exfoliation and abrasion. Most are too small to be sifted out at sewage treatment plants. They end up in our oceans and lakes and become a persistent pollutant. They are about the same size as tiny fish eggs, which means that, essentially, they look like food. If fish eat microbeads, which can soak up toxins such as PCB's like a sponge, scientists suggest that those chemicals could be passed on to humans and wildlife. There are hundreds of thousands in one beauty product alone.

Tens of millions of these tiny microplastic debris are now sitting in the Great Lakes. In order of toxicity is Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Michigan. Lake Michigan is the latest one to be studied, averaging, 17,000 bits of tiny plastic items per square kilometer.

Apparently there are thousands of products world-wide that use microbeads.

What is being done? State lawmakers in New York and Illinois are among the first to approve legislation banning microbeads with compliance required by 2018. While some manufacturers, including P&G, Johnson & Johnson, Colgate-Palmolive, L'Oreal, and Unilever have already agreed to phase out the use of plastic by the end of 2015, there are others, such as Burt's Bees, that already use non-plastic alternatives like powdered pecan shells or coconut husks. Plastic is far more cost effective for manufacturers, thus its earlier popularity.

What we can do? Read labels and avoid products containing microbeads, polypropylene, or polyethylene. There is also an iPhone app, "Beat the Micro Bead" that users can scan product bar codes to see the ingredient list. As I examine all the plastics in my life, one of my greatest concerns is the coffee K-cup that is thrown out daily. Now, that will be a hard one to give up. I don't mind scrubbing my face with apricot pits, but getting into my morning coffee routine is something else. Hopefully an affordable biodegradable cup will be created soon!

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P. S. We welcome columns by members.

Save the Date
April 27, 2015
Our annual Spring Luncheon
will be held at the Royal Fox
Country Club.
Guests are welcome!
Information to follow in
March newsletter.
Ellen Smith, Vice-president

*"In every winter's heart there is a quivering
spring, and behind the veil of each night
there is a smiling dawn."*

~ Kahlil Gibran

