

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF GLITTER

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Valentine's Day has become synonymous with flowers, candy, balloons, and cards but one thing that often accompanies many of these gifts is not actually so cheery. -Scientists and environmental experts are calling on the public to eliminate one Valentine's staple from their celebrations today and throughout the year: *glitter*.

Environmental experts argue that glitter is a direct environmental threat to aquatic environments worldwide. -Most glitter is made of plastic and, due to its small particle size, travels easily through sewage systems where it then enters oceans, rivers, and lakes. -Once they have entered these ecosystems, microplastics, which are plastic particles measuring under 5mm in length, remain indefinitely and can cause serious harm to animals that may consume them. -

Microplastic Pollution Threatens Aquatic Life

A recent report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) notes that microplastic pollution is especially threatening to aquatic environments due to the fact that while many plastics may break down into smaller and smaller particles, -"the original plastic polymer remains intact at microscopic scale unless the original polymer is converted into [...] inorganic compounds, [through] a process of biodegradation influenced by external conditions and the properties of the particular plastic polymer. This generally does not happen to plastics in the aquatic environment." -As a result, microplastic pollution is abundant throughout the world's waterways. -UNEP estimates that "on average, every square kilometre of the world's oceans has 63,320 microplastic particles floating at the surface, with significant regional variations—for example, concentrations in East Asian seas are 27 times higher."

Furthermore, the UNEP cites numerous recent studies that claim "a quarter of the marine fish sampled from markets in Indonesia and California, USA, were found to have plastic debris and fibers from textiles in their guts." -Microplastics remaining in fish used for human consumption can cause serious health effects as a result of the toxicity of the compounds. -UNEP notes, "the presence of microplastic in foodstuffs could potentially increase direct exposure of plastic-associated chemicals to humans and may present an attributable risk to human health. -However, on the basis of current evidence, the risk to human health appears to be no more significant than via other exposure routes."

A Future Ban on Glitter?

While the rate of plastic production worldwide continues to increase, many local communities and governments have passed legislation aimed to curb plastic pollution. -In August 2014, California became the first state to enact legislation imposing a statewide ban on single-use plastic bags at large retail stores. In December of 2015, the United States Congress passed the Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015 to prohibit the manufacturing, packaging, and distribution of rinse-off cosmetics containing microbeads. -The governments of Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and New Zealand have passed their own bans on the distribution of cosmetics using microbeads while similar legislative acts have been proposed in Italy, India and France. -

Environmental legislation frequently originates at a local level, and the potential for a local legislative ban exists, especially as consumer awareness of glitter as a pollutant rises.- There will also likely be increased consumer demand for biodegradable glitters or other eco-friendly alternatives.

The California Environmental Lawyers at Bick Law LLP will continue to monitor the legislative and regulatory frameworks that impact the manufacturing, sale, and use of microplastics in California, the United States, and throughout the global marketplace.

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