

Dept. of Justice: AG Kaul joins coalition sounding alarm over pervasive plastic microfiber pollution, calls on EPA to protect public health

Posted on Monday, May 8, 2023

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MADISON, Wis. – In a letter today to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Attorney General Josh Kaul joined a coalition of 16 states sounding the alarm over pervasive plastic microfiber pollution, urging EPA and NOAA to use the full extent of their authority to protect public health and the safety of our oceans.

Synthetic clothing sheds tiny plastic strands – called “microfibers” – when it is washed. It is estimated that approximately 640,000 to 1,500,000 plastic microfiber pieces are shed per wash cycle and that the United States and Canada pollute an estimated 878 tons of microfibers into the aquatic environment each year. As a result of the inescapable concentration of plastic microfibers in the world’s water, it is estimated that, globally, the average person may consume up to a credit card’s worth of plastic every week.

“Plastic microfibers are pervasive, and we need more information about the impacts they have on the environment and people’s health,” said **Attorney General Kaul**. “The steps proposed in this letter would lead to a clearer understanding of the harms caused by plastic microfiber pollution and assist with the development of an effective nationwide approach for addressing that pollution.”

Plastic microfibers shed from synthetic clothing during wash cycles are now a

significant source of microplastic pollution in the world's water. The pollution is so pervasive that researchers have identified these plastics in fish and shellfish for sale for human consumption across the globe, and in the most remote oceans, including the North and South Poles and the Marianas Trench.

These microfibers likely act as endocrine disruptors. Research reflects that the consumption and inhalation of microplastic and microfibers can be associated with hormonal cancers, reproductive problems including infertility, metabolic disorders including diabetes and obesity, asthma, and neurodevelopmental disorders including autism.

Simple technology already exists that will be required within the next several years in other countries to trap and filter plastic microfibers in the wash cycle before they enter our waterways. Research suggests these technologies can successfully filter out as much as 75 percent of microplastics in each wash cycle.

The EPA is aware of this problem and potential solutions. In a 2020 report titled *What You Should Know About Microfiber Pollution*, the EPA highlights plastic microfibers from synthetic clothing as a "major source of plastic pollution" containing "toxic chemicals" and notes harm to aquatic organisms. The EPA further notes microfiber filtration systems installed in washing machines can prevent a substantial portion of microfibers from entering, and polluting, the waterways and environment. Further, in 2023, the EPA issued a *Draft National Strategy to Prevent Plastic Pollution*, which recognizes the problem of plastic microfibers, and the need to fund more research into microfiber capture technologies including washing machine microfiber filtration systems.

Global awareness of this pervasive pollutant is growing, and several nations have implemented or are considering similar regulations. The United States should lead the field on this issue and take concrete steps to address the problem of plastic.

The EPA has already recognized the importance of utilizing washing machine filters in addressing the serious problem of microfibers. It is now time for the agency to act on its own recommendations. Specifically, the Attorneys General urge EPA and NOAA to evaluate their authority under the Clean Water Act to regulate microfiber pollution, and to direct specific funding and research into both the environmental and human health harms caused by microfibers and into washing machine technology solutions.

Joining Attorney General Kaul in today's letter are the attorneys general of California, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington.

Find this press release on Wisconsin DOJ's website [here](#).