

Canada adds microbeads to list of toxic substances

Action signals intent to ban use in personal care products

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The Canadian government has added “plastic microbeads that are $\leq 5\text{mm}$ in size” to schedule 1 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (Cepa) – the country’s list of toxic substances – following consultation on a [2015 proposal](#).



This paves the way for the government to act on its stated [intent](#), “to prohibit the manufacture, import, sale and offer for sale of microbead-containing personal care products that are used to exfoliate or cleanse.”

Small plastic microbeads, used in such consumer products such as face wash and toothpaste, have been found to accumulate in waterways. Canada’s scientific review concluded that the substance may constitute an immediate or long-term harmful effect to human health or to the environment, per the criteria of paragraph 64(a) of Cepa.

The [definition of the substance](#) was agreed after extensive stakeholder consultations, and amid differing views on the size and makeup of covered microplastics. The final definition aligns with that set out in a [US bill](#), signed into law last year, to ban the substance.

Stakeholders react

Darren Praznik, president & CEO at the Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association (CCTFA), said the government action “ensures a common regulatory approach across the Canadian market”.

CCTFA worked closely with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to “develop and refine the published definition, and we are very pleased that it has been finalised”, he added.

The Canadian NGO Environmental Defence, which last year [expressed concerns](#) with the government’s approach, applauded the news. It will enable the government to “move on regulations to ban microbeads under Cepa”, it said.

Maggie Macdonald, programme manager, toxics at Environmental Defence, said that the government's action comes at a time when a call is being made for "improvements to risk management under Cepa, to ensure toxic substances are removed from products in a timely manner."

"We hope that this swift action on microbeads is a sign of things to come, when it comes to the federal government's attention to toxic chemicals," she added.

Voluntary phase-out

A 2015 survey showed that Canada imported about 100,000kg of plastic microbeads in personal care mixtures and products. In addition, between 1,000 to 10,000kg were used to manufacture exfoliating and cleansing personal care products.

According to Mr Praznik, Canada began a voluntary phase-out some time ago, which many CCTFA members have already completed.

"CCTFA will continue our efforts with ECCC and members to phase out any remaining microbeads in affected products."

According to Ms Macdonald, [several large companies](#) have taken the lead to end the use of the substance, "effectively eliminating economic arguments for delaying a ban".

Global action

In the US, bans on microbeads in rinse-off cosmetics begin from 1 July 2017. The federal action preempts similar bans that had been passed at the local level in more than half a dozen states.

In Europe, a joint call was issued in December 2014 by Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden, to ban the substance in personal care products.

In May, [Denmark's](#) environment and food minister urged the European Commission to introduce a Europe-wide ban on the use in cosmetic products.

Cosmetics giants in the UK, however, are [lukewarm](#) on a potential microplastics ban.



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