



NYPIRG SUPPORTS

For: New York City Council Committee on Consumer Affairs

Date: 10/26/2015

Contact: Farouk Abdallah, farouk@nypirg.org, 212-349-6460 ext. 1118

INTRO 928

“NEW YORK CITY WATERWAY PROTECTION ACT OF 2015”

NYPIRG supports the passage of New York City Council bill Intro 928, which would ban the sale of microbeads in New York City.

Microbeads are tiny plastic particles added to personal care products as a scrubbing agent or exfoliate.¹ Over the past decade, manufacturers have been using plastic microbeads as an alternative to pumice, sea salt, and other natural abrasives. They are now emerging as a serious environmental threat to waterways.

These tiny plastic particles snake down the drains of consumers and past the protections of wastewater treatment facilities until they make their way into New York's waterways, and eventually to the ocean. This is a particular problem in the Great Lakes which have seen alarmingly high levels of microbeads collecting in their waters due to lengthy water turnover rates. In 2012, researchers found that microbeads made up half of all plastics collected on the surface of Lake Erie.² Microbeads are found in other waterways as well, including the Hudson River.³

Microbeads, like other plastics, collect toxins and chemicals within the water. They are mistaken for food by birds and marine life, thus allowing the pollution to climb up the food chain through bio-magnification. It is likely that many fish harvested for human consumption have been contaminated by ingesting microbeads.

The growing concern over microbeads has spurred action across the nation. California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, and Wisconsin have passed laws banning microbeads.⁴ Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie and Suffolk counties have passed microbead bans.

¹ For a detailed look at the impact of microbeads in New York: New York State Office of the Attorney General's report, "Unseen Threat: How Microbeads Harm New York Waters, Wildlife, Health And Environment," see: http://ag.ny.gov/pdfs/Microbeads_Report_5_14_14.pdf.

² Drury, T., "NYS Legislation would ban cosmetic microbeads," *Buffalo Business First*, 2/11/14, see: <http://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/news/2014/02/11/nys-proposes-law-to-ban-cosmetic-beads.html?page=all>.

³ New York State Office of the Attorney General, "Down The Drain: Microbeads in the Mid-Hudson," see: http://www.ag.ny.gov/pdfs/Mid-Hudson_NY_Combined.pdf.

⁴ National Conference of State Legislatures, "States Continue to Ban Microbeads," see: <http://www.ncsl.org/blog/2015/10/14/states-continue-moves-to-ban-microbeads.aspx>.

Intro 928 will help protect New York City waterways and our natural ecosystems by preventing plastic pollution and may spur similar action in Albany and in Washington, DC.

NYPIRG urges support for this important initiative.