



ANTHONY G. BROWN, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:
press@oag.state.md.us
410-576-7009

Letter to EPA: Pervasive Plastic Microfiber Is Polluting Environment

Attorney General Brown Calls on EPA to Protect Public Health and Ocean Safety

BALTIMORE (May 8, 2023) – In a [letter](#) today to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown 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.

“The United States needs to join other countries that are already helping prevent plastic microfibers from choking our environment and public health,” said Attorney General Brown. “We cannot stand by while plastics poison our communities. Our residents are unknowingly eating food with these plastics, which is the result of this dangerous cycle. Everyone, especially our children, deserve our greatest efforts to keep them safe and healthy.”

Plastic microfibers shed from synthetic clothing during wash cycles are now a main source of microplastic pollution in the world’s water. Synthetic clothing sheds tiny plastic strands – called “microfibers” – when it’s washed, shedding approximately 640,000 to 1,500,000 plastic microfiber pieces per wash cycle. The United States and Canada pollute about 878 tons of microfibers into the aquatic environment each year.

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. As a result of the inescapable concentration of plastic microfibers in the world’s water, it’s estimated that, globally, the average person may consume a credit card’s worth of plastic every week.

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.

Technology already exists and is required 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.

EPA is aware of this problem and potential solutions. In a 2020 report, *What You Should Know About Microfiber Pollution*, EPA highlights plastic microfibers from synthetic clothing as a “major source of plastic pollution” containing “toxic chemicals” and notes harm to aquatic organisms. EPA further notes microfiber filtration systems installed in washing machines can prevent a substantial portion of microfibers from entering and polluting waterways and the environment. Further, in 2023, 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.

In the letter, the coalition urges EPA 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 Brown in today’s letter are the Attorneys General of California, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2023/050823.pdf>