

Calif. contemplates microbead ban

By Julia Lurie, Mother Jones

California is the latest state to consider banning products with microbeads, the tiny pieces of plastic, often less than a millimeter wide, that have become a popular addition to cosmetics and personal care products. Usually made of polyethylene, microbeads primarily serve as exfoliants in face washes and body scrubs, but also add color and texture to toothpastes, lip balms, moisturizing creams, and makeup.

A single tube of face wash can contain more than 300,000 of the plastic beads, which are cheaper than other common natural exfoliants like apricot seeds, coconut husks, or diatomaceous earth.

Microbeads are so small that they aren't caught by most water treatment plants, so they wind up in lakes, streams, and oceans. According to a report by New York's attorney general, as many as 19 tons of microbeads could be discharged into the state's waterways each year. Assuming all Americans are dumping microbeads at that rate, 300 tons per year end up in U.S. waterways.

Read the whole story