

Opening Statement of the Honorable Joseph R. Pitts
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “Examining Microbeads in Cosmetic Products”
May 1, 2015

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today’s Health Subcommittee hearing will be examining the sale, distribution, and use of cosmetics that contain synthetic plastic microbeads and – what impact those microbeads may have on our waterways.

Our colleagues, Reps. Frank Pallone (NJ) and Fred Upton (MI) have jointly introduced legislation, H.R. 1321- the “Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015” which would prohibit the sale or distribution of cosmetics containing synthetic plastic microbeads and a number of state legislatures have also taken independent action in this area.

Scientists discovered the presence of these tiny plastic beads accumulating at high levels in the Great Lakes and other waterways.

Microbeads are commonly used as an abrasion, or exfoliating scrub, and can be found in toothpaste, facial scrubs, some soaps and even shampoos. When these microbeads wash down the drain, they end up in sewer systems and because they are small, and buoyant, they pass through sewage treatment plants and are discharged into rivers, lakes and oceans.

Admittedly, there are other plastic litter that had broken down from plastic debris, but the concern is that the synthetic plastic microbeads are difficult, if not impossible, to break down.

We will hear from the cosmetics industry today about their commitment to phasing out the use of microbeads in their products. We also have two witnesses from the Great Lakes to discuss the impact on their waterways as well as New Jersey State Senator Greenstein, who co-sponsored the legislation in her home state.

The concern, of course, is that different state-based legislation will result in a patchwork of regulations and requirements making it difficult, if not impossible, for manufacturers to comply with so many different laws.

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