

Testimony for the House Committee on Energy and Environment
April 7, 2015

HB 3478

Oregon Environmental Council

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council **opposes** HB 3478 as introduced because it would fail to account for non-synthetic plastic sources of microbead pollution.

As drafted, the bill would still allow the use of microbeads made from polymers derived from plant sources like corn starch in personal care products and over-the-counter drugs. While these "bio-based" plastics are sometimes considered or labeled "biodegradable", the extent to which these plastics decompose in the natural environment can vary depending on ecological conditions.

We recommend changing "synthetic plastic microbead" to "plastic microbead" throughout the bill to specify that microbeads manufactured from both synthetic plastics, as well as bio-based plastics, are included in the proposed law. Additionally, clearly defining "biodegradable" in HB 3748 to include the "ability to be completely assimilated by the microbial populations present in marine and freshwater aquatic systems in short periods of time" is recommended. The rate and extent of microbead biodegradation should be rapid and complete in the natural environment, and sufficient to avoid impacting aquatic organisms or creating persistent residues.

Research shows that marine animals consume microscopic bits of plastics that attract other harmful chemicals in the environment like polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The quality of Oregon's rivers, stream, and marine environments is critically important to the well being of our communities and our economy.

While we appreciate efforts to eliminate sources of aquatic pollution including plastics and the toxic chemicals they often contain, it must be noted that industry is already phasing out the use of microbeads, making this legislation largely unnecessary. The Personal Care Products Council stated on April 16, 2014 that the industry was "...publicly announcing plans to phase out the use of these ingredients" in reference to microbeads.¹ Johnson & Johnson, among other manufacturers, has already made the commitment to phase out the use of microbeads in their products by the end of 2017.²

¹ <http://www.personalcarecouncil.org/newsroom/20141604>

² <http://www.safetyandcarecommitment.com/ingredient-info/other/microbeads>