Plastic microbeads to be banned by 2017, UK government pledges

**The UK government has announced plans to ban microbeads used in cosmetics and cleaning products by 2017.**

The small pieces of plastic commonly found in toothpaste, exfoliating body scrubs and other household products and are thought to damage the environment.

Environmentalists fear they are building up in oceans and potentially entering the food chain.

A consultation on how a ban would work will start later this year, Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom has announced.

A number of cosmetic companies have made voluntary commitments to phase out the use of microbeads by 2020.

Many cosmetics brands include information on their websites. Johnson & Johnson which produces face scrubs under the brands Neutrogena and Clean & Clear has committed to phasing out microbeads by the end of 2017.

Proctor and Gamble which owns Crest toothpaste, Gillette and Olay, has also promised to stop using them by next year.

The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee last month said the government needed to step in to protect the environment as soon as is practicable, after it was revealed a single shower can result in 100,000 plastic particles entering the ocean.

Mrs Leadsom said: "Most people would be dismayed to know the face scrub or toothpaste they use was causing irreversible damage to the environment, with billions of indigestible plastic pieces poisoning sea creatures.

"Adding plastic to products like face washes and body scrubs is wholly unnecessary when harmless alternatives can be used."

She said it was the "next step in tackling microplastics in our seas" following the introduction of the 5p plastic bag charge, which was introduced in England in October.

**Taking Microbeads straight to No10!**

June 2016, we took [the petition urging David Cameron to ban microbeads](https://secure.greenpeace.org.uk/microbeads) to Number 10 Downing Street, complete with 312,239 of **YOUR** signatures!<--break->

Since the petition opened at the beginning of this year, there has been an enormous groundswell of support for this campaign to ban microbeads, with 10,000 people adding their name to the petition in the last week alone!

**What's so sinister about microbeads and why do over 300k people care?**

Microbeads are tiny pieces of plastic [(aka microplastics)](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/blog/oceans/baby-fish-are-hooked-plastic-junk-food-20160603) that are added to everyday cosmetic products like facewash, toothpaste and abrasive cleaners. They are so small that our filtration systems can't capture them and they end up in the oceans, polluting the environment and moving up the food chain. The latest studies have even shown juvenile fish choosing microplastics over their natural food sources. Scientists described baby fish eating microplastics ['like teens eating fast food'!](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-36435288)

The petition, created in collaboration with the [Environmental Investigation Agency](https://eia-international.org/), [Fauna & Flora International](http://www.fauna-flora.org/), and the [Marine Conservation Society](https://www.mcsuk.org/), calls on David Cameron to ban microbeads, joining other world leaders like President Obama and the Canadian Prime Minister who’ve already banned companies from using these wholly unnecessary bits of plastic.

Now we wait to hear the PM's response, but with this many voices how can he ignore us?

In December [the US passed a ban on microbeads](http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/30/health/obama-bans-microbeads/) in “rinse off” products, a move that was supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

We seized this opportunity, and in January launched a joint petition with the [Environmental Investigation Agency](https://eia-international.org/tag/microplastics), [Fauna and Flora International](http://www.fauna-flora.org/initiatives/the-good-scrub-guide/), and the [Marine Conservation Society](https://www.mcsuk.org/what_we_do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/Campaigns+and+policy/Microplastics) (and later joined by the international [Beat the Microbead](http://www.beatthemicrobead.org/en/) coalition) calling on David Cameron to follow suit and ban microbeads in the UK. If they can do it in the US, why not here?

So many people signed the petition in the first few weeks that we were quickly generating headlines.

As an indication of how much the issue had moved up the political agenda, the UK parliament’s Environmental Audit Committee launched an inquiry into microplastics in March. Although their report has not yet been published, the chair of the committee has already [indicated that they might call for a ban](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-3625610/Cosmetics-companies-urged-clean-act-plastic-pollution.html), saying that cosmetics companies need to “clean up their act”.

In April [we undertook a survey](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/media/press-releases/over-90-britons-want-cameron-ban-toxic-microbeads-20160414) to see what the great British public thinks about the issue. It turns out that hardly anyone knew much about microbeads, and people were shocked when they were told that they are hiding in lots of the products we use every day, from face washes to deodorants. Around two thirds of Brits said they definitely wouldn’t buy products containing microbeads in the future, or would only do so if no alternatives were available. And a whopping 91% said that they would definitely or possibly support a UK-wide ban on these pesky plastics.

However, the government response remained that they were working with the industry on voluntary phase-outs, [despite evidence that this approach isn’t working](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/08/mps-attack-loopholes-in-cosmetic-industrys-microbead-phase-out).

But earlier this week, George Eustice, the Defra Minister responsible, said “it’s right now for us to progress and proceed with a ban”. So, finally, [the government has acknowledged that a ban is needed](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/14/nment-backs-microbeads-ban-george-eustice), and that voluntary agreements by companies are not the answer.

Aug 2016 Great news this morning - an influential government committee just backed our call for a ban on microbeads!<--break->

[Sign the petition - ask Theresa May’s Government to show leadership on this important environmental issue and ban microbeads.](https://secure.greenpeace.org.uk/page/s/ban-microbeads?source=wb&subsource=20160817ocwb01)

Aug 2016 Just a day after a cross-party group of MPs [called](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-37161479) on the Government to ban microbeads, [a new Greenpeace report](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/sites/files/gpuk/PlasticsInSeafood-Final.pdf) lays out the science on the impact of microplastics, including microbeads, on our oceans and our seafood.

June 2016, while we handed in our [BanTheBead petition](http://greenpeace.co.uk/blog/oceans/microbeads-no10-20160609), I took a trip down to Parliament to attend the [Environmental Audit Committee’s (EAC)](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/) inquiry into the [environmental impact of microplastics](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/environmental-impact-of-microplastics-15-16/). The EAC is a group of MPs from all parties who come together to review and attempt to resolve environmental issues such as climate change, flooding and air quality and last Wednesday, they looked at microplastics.<--break->

[**Over 90% of Britons want Cameron to ban toxic microbeads**](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/media/press-releases/over-90-britons-want-cameron-ban-toxic-microbeads-20160414)

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*London, 13 April 2016 -* An overwhelming majority of Britons believe a ban should be introduced in the UK on the harmful microplastics known as microbeads, according to a new survey commissioned by Greenpeace UK. More than 90 % of respondents supported a ban similar to that introduced by Barack Obama in the US, representing an opportunity for David Cameron to take a position at the leadership table on marine plastic pollution.

The results of the poll published today showed that an overwhelming 84 % of consumers would be turned off from buying  a company’s product if it was found to be extensively polluting the oceans and come after more than a quarter of a million people have signed [a petition calling for a ban](https://secure.greenpeace.org.uk/page/s/ban-microbeads).

The survey also demonstrated that over two thirds of people were not aware of what a microbead was, but when told said they would subsequently avoid using anything containing them.