

Scientist: Spread word of microbead pollution

By Joe Mahoney Staff Writer Feb 17, 2016

http://www.thedailystar.com/news/local_news/scientist-spread-word-of-microbead-pollution/article_e8bd46b3-f701-5e0c-8e40-5780f69544e9.html

MIDDLEFIELD — One of the best ways to counter the spread of tiny beads of plastic found in some skin cleansers and toothpastes is through public awareness, a biology professor who has conducted water quality research said Wednesday.

“We need to make a better choice for the environment and for ourselves,” said Kiyoko Yokota, a State University College at Oneonta professor who conducts research at the Biological Field Station at Otsego Lake in Cooperstown.

Yokota has delved into the impacts of so-called microbeads being ingested by algae. She warned it is possible for such algae to be eaten by fish, which in turn are consumed by people, who then end up with the toxins contained in the bits of plastic in their own bodies.

Her presentation to the Otsego County Solid Waste and Environmental Concerns Committee came amid increasing scrutiny on the cosmetics industry for its use of tiny shreds of plastic in some cleaning and scrubbing products.

Plastic particles can also break away from some garments, such as those made from fleece, when they are washed, Yokota said. Studies have shown a rising level of plastic contamination in ocean water, particularly near areas of high population density, she said.

The bits of plastic can pose an environmental threat for hundreds of years after they are manufactured, and estimates show that approximately 72 percent of the 300 million metric tons of plastic packaging that is manufactured ends up being released into the environment, she said.

She recommended that consumers familiarize themselves with the names of the ingredients used by manufacturers in personal care products if they want to avoid buying products containing microbeads.

She also said the plastic particles can contribute to dental health problems when they become wedged in the gum line or between teeth.

Some manufacturers, she said, give the impression that their products have natural ingredients by emphasizing they are made with coconut shavings or other biodegradable materials.

“You need to be a bit careful, because just because they have coconut or walnut or apricot they could still have plastic particles,” she said.

*President Barack Obama in December signed legislation that bans the manufacture of “rinse-off cosmetics” -- products that can be washed down drains after use -- containing the beads effective after July 2017. That step is a lead-in to sales of such products being halted in 2018-19.

A number of environmental groups have warned that the presence of plastic waste is growing at an alarming rate in oceans and lakes.

Yokoto is slated to make a detailed presentation of her work on microbeads at 1 p.m. next Wednesday to the Otsego County Water Quality Coordinating Committee. The event is hosted by the Otsego County Planning Department and is open to the public.

Reservations can be made by contacting Darla Youngs, the secretary for the WQCC by emailing to admin@occainfo.org or calling 547-4488.

**The original story had the date wrong for when the ban would take place.*