



Planet Vs. Plastics: How CalEPA is tackling the plastic pollution problem

Description

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[En espa±ol.](#)

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Did you know packaging, most of it plastic, makes up more than 50% of what California dumps in landfills? Thatâ??s about 290 Olympic-sized swimming pools per day of trash that will take hundreds of years or more to decompose. For decades, producers have falsely advertised single-use plastic products as recyclable when they were designed to be thrown away. Single-use plastics accumulate in landfills and break down into microplastics that pollute air, food, water and our bodies.

Plastic production is also [a significant source of emissions](#); greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the plastic industry are expected to surpass those from coal-fired power in the United States by 2030. Plastic production undermines Californiaâ??s emissions reduction goals and our commitment to transition away from fossil fuels. We must address plastic production and emissions at the source.

Cutting Plastic at the Source and Holding Producers Accountable

Recycling will help build Californiaâ??s [circular economy](#), but we canâ??t just recycle our way out of the plastic pollution problem. California is holding plastic producers responsible. The nation-leading [Plastic Pollution Prevention and Packaging Producer Responsibility Act \(SB 54\)](#), signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom in 2022, will protect our communities and ecosystems while driving innovation and green jobs. California is cutting single-use plastics at the source and requiring producers to make some serious changes to reach these goals by 2032:

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Tackling plastic production and pollution also will require the sustained development of tools, science, technology, reporting and regulation. Across CalEPA's boards, departments and office, we're innovating to meet this challenge.

Microplastics

Over time, plastics including those used for packaging break down into smaller and smaller pieces. When they get smaller than 5 mm, they are called microplastics. Studies indicate that microplastics may cause tissue inflammation, impaired growth, developmental anomalies and reproductive difficulties.

The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment's (OEHHA) [water toxicology staff](#) supported the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) in creating a framework for developing a health-based screening level for microplastics in drinking water monitoring activity. Knowing the risks we face supports policy and regulatory action against plastic pollution and empowers Californians to make informed decisions. Yet, there is still a lot we do not know about the impacts of microplastics on human health and the environment.

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Microplastics and Drinking Water

In 2020, the State Water Board's Division of Drinking Water launched efforts to standardize microplastic monitoring in drinking water, surface water, sediment and fish. With these efforts, California became the first government in the world to require microplastics testing for drinking water. [The Policy Handbook Establishing a Standard Method of Testing and Reporting of Microplastics in Drinking Water](#), adopted in 2022, includes a formal definition of microplastics, establishes [a standardized method](#) of testing microplastics in drinking water and maps out a four-year implementation plan. This milestone gives scientists a tool for reliably characterizing risks and making recommendations for adapting to the rapidly developing science and technology for monitoring microplastics.

Microplastics from Tires

While some microplastics come from packaging, tire particles may be the biggest global source. The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) is [compelling manufacturers to make tires chemically safer](#) by identifying safer alternatives to 6PPD, a chemical linked to coho salmon deaths. DTSC also has proposed listing microplastics as a Candidate Chemical, which would allow the [Safer Consumer Products \(SCP\) Program](#) to evaluate â?? and potentially regulate â?? specific consumer products that contain or generate microplastics.

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A post shared by California Governor (@cagovernor)

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