



## Mayors Press for Action on Microplastics

*Cities Initiative engages industry and regulators and enlists public help*

**Chicago, IL, October 29, 2013** - Today, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative sent letters to regulators and industry asking for their commitment to take action on removing microplastics from personal care products and cleaning up the microplastics already in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. To see the documents, visit <http://www.glslcities.org/initiatives/microplastics.cfm>. The Cities Initiative has also enlisted its over 100 member mayors to reach out to their citizens and businesses to raise awareness of the threat of microplastics to our waters and to take action to reduce any new introduction of microplastics to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities. This coincides with the release of additional research by the 5 Gyres Institute on the extent of microplastic pollution in the Great Lakes. For more information on the study, visit: [http://5gyres.org/posts/2013/10/28/5\\_gyres\\_publishes\\_first\\_scientific\\_paper\\_on\\_plastic\\_pollution\\_in\\_the\\_great\\_lakes/](http://5gyres.org/posts/2013/10/28/5_gyres_publishes_first_scientific_paper_on_plastic_pollution_in_the_great_lakes/).

“The Cities Initiative calls on regulators and companies to do the right thing and get microplastics out of personal care products and out of the Great Lakes,” said Mayor Keith Hobbs of Thunder Bay (ON), chair of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative.

Microplastics are plastic debris smaller than 5mm in diameter. They include industrial broken fragments, polystyrene pieces, cosmetic product residues and synthetic textile fibers found in many common consumer products including toothpaste, deodorants, body washes, hand cleansers and facial exfoliate.

In summer 2012, Dr. Sherri Mason, a professor at SUNY Fredonia, recorded the plastic content of Lake Huron, Lake Erie and Lake Superior and discovered microplastics in greater concentrations in Lake Erie than any other body of water on Earth, with concentrations exceeding data collected in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Alarming levels were also present in Lakes Huron and Superior. These findings were confirmed in a peer-reviewed article released this week by the 5 Gyres Foundation.<sup>1</sup>

These microplastics pose a number of threats to the Great Lakes. Firstly, fish, birds and other wildlife ingest the plastics. This can cause internal blockage, dehydration and death in these species. Secondly, they affect the quality of ecosystems and habitats. The presence of microplastics on beaches changes the physical properties of the beach, which

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<sup>1</sup> Eriksen, M., et. al. Microplastics Pollution in the Surface Waters of the Laurentian Great Lakes. Mar. Pollut. Bull. (2013).

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may contribute to the permeability of beach sand and affect organisms dependent on land temperature. Thirdly, and most significantly, these microplastics transport other pollutants. They absorb pollutants already in the water, such as DDT, polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). When ingested either by wildlife or humans (either directly or indirectly), these plastics contain super-concentrations of these dangerous toxins. The toxins become even more concentrated and dangerous as they bioaccumulate in the food chain.

“These microplastics are invisible and can permeate the entire water body all the way down to the lake bed. Even though you cannot see them, they pose a very real threat to human and wildlife health,” said Mayor John Dickert of Racine (WI), Secretary-Treasurer of the Cities Initiative.

The Cities Initiative has contacted the United States EPA and Environment Canada to highlight the growing problem of microplastics in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Mayor Hobbs, Chair of the Cities Initiative, detailed the threat of microplastics in the Great Lakes system and requested that the regulators discuss the current and planned steps being taken to stop future additions of microplastics to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence and clean up those microplastics currently present.

The Cities Initiative has also reached out to the leading producers of microplastics, including Beiersdorf, Bath and Body Works, Johnson & Johnson, Kao Brands Company, L’Oreal, Mentholatum, Proctor & Gamble, Reckitt-Benckiser and Unilever. The Cities Initiative provided information to industry about plans already underway at several competitors to phase out some microplastics, and pressed for more immediate action to prevent further accumulations of microplastics in the Great Lakes. The Cities Initiative requested information on how industry would help clean up existing concentrations of microplastics.

Working together with EPA, Environment Canada and the leading industrial producers, the Cities Initiative looks to end future accumulation of microplastics and to clean up existing microplastics to protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

The Cities Initiative also appealed to its member mayors to enlist the public’s help in combatting the threat from microplastics.

“Awareness of the impact that a consumer can have is crucial,” said David Ullrich, Executive Director of the Cities Initiative. “Many people do not realize the extent to which their choice of products can help protect the environment.”

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**About the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative:**

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative ([www.gslscities.org](http://www.gslscities.org)) is a binational coalition of Mayors and other local officials that works actively with federal, state, tribal, first nation and provincial governments and other stakeholders to advance the protection, restoration and promotion of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin. The organization represents over 100 cities of all sizes, with a combined population of over 16 million.

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