

# Microplastics: Conclusions will be published by the year's end

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The region is the birthplace of the first-ever microplastic filtration system, which has helped remove thousands of tiny pieces of plastic degraded from larger waste in cleanup drives organized by the environmental nonprofit Sea Turtles Forever.

"Trash Talk," a program to convert plastics into jewelry that is sold to support the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, has raised regional awareness about plastic pollution since last year.

But despite local efforts, the problem continues to grow. According to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, at least 8 million metric tons of plastic enters the ocean each year. About 1.5 million metric tons of plastic in the ocean are estimated to be microplastics.

Surveys have shown plastic accumulation doubling at Crescent Beach. Fort Stevens State Park has a figure as high as 11,000 pieces per square meter, while other Oregon Coast beaches sit closer to 800 per square meter.

In the past two weeks alone, Sea Turtles Forever has removed more than 1,000 pounds of microplastics just from Cannon Beach sands north of Whale Park.

"Last year it only took us three days to clean this section of the beach. This year, it took 14," Marc Ward, the group's founder, said. "That's easily four times as much from last year. It's not getting better."

Ward said strong tides pushing up against river currents could be partly to blame for high concentrations of plastics on Clatsop County beaches. Multiple plastic mold injection companies in the Portland metro area could be contributing to more plastic entering



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

ABOVE: Kerry Lyons and Marc Ward sort through organic material looking for pieces of plastic. LEFT: Sea Turtles Forever has removed thousands of pounds of plastic from beaches.

local waterways, he said, but plastic has been identified from all over the Pacific Rim.

### Regional approach

That's part of the appeal of the regional approach to

change water quality standards, Kopcho said.

"It's really hard to tell where this plastic is coming from," he said. "Is it coming from a pellet plant? Is it plastic in the gyre? But the good part

about getting listed is it gives each state flexibility to address their amount of pollution."

Ways to do this, Kopcho said, include plastic disincentives, like recent bans on plastic straws, or offsetting microfiber plastic pollution that comes from washing machines.

A United Nations study

found about a third of all microplastic releases come from laundering synthetic textiles, like polyester or nylon clothing. The state could use technology to filter the microfibers before they enter the ocean via outfalls from the sewer system, or institute taxes on clothes with synthetic textiles to curb consumption.

Requests like these will be reviewed by the state and conclusions will be published by the end of the year, according to the Department of Environmental Quality.

"We're creatively looking for ways to address plastic pollution problems, and we think this is a powerful avenue to get there," Kopcho said.

# Tobacco: About 16.2 percent of Oregonians smoked tobacco in 2016

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The public health division is now publishing the names of the retailers who sell to minors for the first time, much like the Oregon Liquor Control Commission publishes the names of drinking establishments and can-

nabis retailers who have been found to sell products to people younger than 21 through similar inspections, called "minor decoy operations" or "stings."

In most cases during the Oregon Health Authority's inspections, the underage customers attempted to buy

cigarettes, but some also tried to purchase e-cigarettes and cigarillos.

Retailers are required by state law to post signs stating that customers younger than 21 cannot purchase tobacco, according to the health authority. Those signs are available for download

free of charge on the agency's website. The state health agency says it began outreach efforts after the Tobacco 21 bill was signed into law in August.

The health authority says it mailed letters to every known retailer selling tobacco products and "inhalant delivery

systems" in the state, placed advertisements in newspapers, promoted resources for quitting smoking through social media and reminded the public of the impending law change through press releases in December.

About 16.2 percent of Oregonians smoked tobacco in

2016, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's a rate slightly lower than the national average of 17.5 percent.

*The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

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