



House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife Legislative Hearing
January 14, 2020

Statement for the Record re: HR 1834, Defending Our National Marine Sanctuaries from Dangerous Chemicals Act of 2019

Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock, the Personal Care Products Council (PCPC), which represents global cosmetics and personal care products companies, including sunscreen manufacturers, submits the following statement on H.R. 1834, legislation that directs the Department of Commerce to prohibit sunscreens containing octinoxate and oxybenzone in National Marine Sanctuaries where coral is present.

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer, with one-in-five people in the U.S. expected to be diagnosed within their lifetime. Ninety percent of non-melanoma skin cancers are associated with exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. Skin cancer is one of the most preventable cancers – the benefits of regular sunscreen use as a protection against skin cancer are well-studied and well-known. Sunscreens are a proven preventative barrier to the harmful effects of solar radiation, and we are concerned that restricting the use of vital sunscreen ingredients could lead to higher skin cancer rates in the U.S.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Surgeon General, the American Academy of Dermatology, the Skin Cancer Foundation and health care professionals worldwide emphasize that using sunscreens is a critical part of a safe sun regimen.

PCPC member companies have long been committed to responsible management of our environmental impact. We agree that the decline of coral reefs is an urgent issue requiring policymakers to take pressing action. However, we also believe that proven causes of coral reef decline should be addressed before policymakers focus on unproven allegations such as contamination of coastal waters by sunscreens.

There are several proven and well documented causes of coral reef degradation in the U.S., first and foremost, is climate change as well as local factors such as Stony Coral Disease in Florida. According to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program, coral reefs are impacted by an increasing array of hazards – primarily from effects of pollution (acidification and runoff), global climate change and unsustainable fishing practices.ⁱ

Published studies claiming to show adverse impacts of sunscreens on coral (e.g. Downs et al. 2016) are unreliable and should therefore not be used when making important policy decisions.ⁱⁱ Measured sunscreen levels in U.S. coastal waters where coral live are extremely low (parts per trillion levels have been detected) - equivalent to adding a few drops of sunscreen to the Rosebowl Stadium filled with seawater (Mitchelmore et al., 2019).ⁱⁱⁱ

PCPC advocated for a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) review to examine the risk of sunscreens to coral reefs and make recommendations for future studies that would work towards a scientific consensus. We also support the NAS review considering the disastrous public health implications associated with reduced use of sunscreen ingredients. In particular, PCPC supports NAS Review report language, that was included in HR, 1855, FY2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations that was signed into law last year.

Environmental Impact of Currently Marketed Sunscreens.-The Committees recognize the important health benefits that come from reducing exposure to ultraviolet radiation, including by the use of sunscreens. To better assess any potential environmental impacts of currently marketed sunscreen 43 filters on the environment, the Agency is directed to contract with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to conduct a review of the scientific literature of currently marketed sunscreens' potential risks to the marine environment. This review should include any risks that sunscreen filters might pose to freshwater ecosystems, coral reefs, aquatic and marine life, and wetland ecosystems, and should identify any additional research needed to conduct aquatic environmental risk assessments. Additionally, the study should also review the current scientific literature on the potential public health implications associated with reduced use of currently marketed sunscreen ingredients for protection against excess ultraviolet radiation.

In addition to support of the NAS review, PCPC has invested in a research program to produce reliable scientific data on levels of sunscreens in U.S. coastal waters and whether these levels are harmful to coral reefs. PCPC is working with academic partners at the University of Maryland Centre for Environmental Science and University of Southern Florida's Guy Harvey Oceanographic Centre – both are independent global centers of excellence for marine and coral sciences.

PCPC recommends that policy decisions not be made ahead of a scientific consensus on this issue. We request that the Committee wait until an NAS review and ongoing scientific research are completed upon which informed policy decisions can be made. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this issue and look forward to working with the Subcommittee on this issue going forward.

References

ⁱ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) - <https://aamboceanservice.blob.core.windows.net/oceanservice-prod/facts/coralbleaching.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Downs C.A., Kramarsky-Winter E., Segal R., Fauth J.E., Knutson S., Bronstein O., Ciner F.R., Jeger R., Lichtenfeld Y., Woodley C.M., Pennington P., Cadenas K., Kushmaro A. and Loya, Y. 2016. Toxicopathological effects of the sunscreen UV filter, Oxybenzone (benzophenone-3), on coral planulae and cultured primary cells and its environmental contamination in Hawaii and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Archives of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology 70 (2), 265-288.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mitchelmore, C.L., He, K., Gonsior, M., Hain, E., Heyes, A., Clark, C., Younger, R., Schmitt-Kopplin, P., Feerick, A., Conwat, A. and L. Blaney. 2019. Occurrence and distribution of UV filters in coastal surface water, sediment and coral tissue from Hawaii. Science of the Total Environment 670, 398-410.