



# Current EU initiatives to prevent microplastics in the environment

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# The issue

Microplastics = **small solid particles composed of synthetic polymers that are non-degradable and less than 5mm in size**  
(*European Chemicals Agency*)



- Microplastics are:
  - ✓ ubiquitous, persistent and accumulate
  - ✓ transported by wind, snow and rain, and traveling across entire continents
  - ✓ found in soil, air & waters, plants, animals, human diet & drinking water, in the Antarctic & on the Everest
- They can transport and absorb other organic contaminants
- Impacts on environment and potentially on health
- Rising public awareness & overwhelming support for action in public consultation

# The political mandate

2018



Acknowledgment of risks posed by microplastics & first actions

2020



Commitment to address microplastics:

- intentionally added
- unintentionally released

2021



30% reduction of microplastic releases by 2030

# Filling the gap to tackle plastics pollution

## Macroplastics

- waste legislation
- SUP Directive



## Intentionally added microplastics to products

- Eg cosmetics, detergents, fertilizers coating
- Towards a ban through REACH restriction dossier by 2023 - possible reduction in microplastics emissions of approx. 500 thousand tonnes over 20 years

## Unintentional releases of microplastics

- Resulting from the use of a product, for instance abrasion or fragmentation
- Towards legislation to reduce microplastic releases

# Legislation for microplastic releases: limited to monitoring requirements

- Proposed revision of **Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive**
- Proposed revision of polluting substances in the **Water Framework Directive (WFD)**, the **Groundwater Directive (GWD)** and the **Environmental Quality Standards Directive (EQSD)**
- Recast **Drinking Water Directive (DWD)**
- **Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)**

→ *Still more is needed*



# FLO

for living oceans and water

**2** Belgian students from ULB and UCL

**1** journey to better understand plastic pollution

**24** European countries

**71** samples of plastic waste (micro/macro)

supported by



**SCAN ME**



<https://www.flowproject.be>

# Sources of unintentional releases of microplastics

- Originally determined as most important sources:
  - **Pellets:** small granules that are intermediate raw material to manufacture plastic items
  - **Tyres**
  - **Textiles - clothes**
- Three additional sources identified in the 'draft IA study' and by stakeholders:
  - **Paints:** marine paints, road markings, architectural paints, ...
  - **Geotextiles:** used in construction e.g. for building roads, coastal & flooding protection
  - **Soluble films in detergent capsules** for laundry and dishwashers

# Releases to the environment in the EU

(*provisional* figures from 'draft IA study')

Source	Quantity (tons/year)
Paints	482 000
Tyres	450 000
Pellets	134 260 – 198 190
Textiles	1 649 – 61 078
Geotextiles	6 000 – 19 750
Detergent capsules	18 000
<b>Total emissions from the 6 sources</b>	<b>800 000 – 1 800 000</b> <b>(90% of the total sources)</b>



# Links with other regulatory initiatives

<b>Paints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation</b></li></ul>
<b>Tyres</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Euro 7:</b> Review clause to include tyre abrasion limits. Ongoing study on tyre abrasion test method</li><li>• <b>Tyre Labelling Regulation:</b> delegated acts possible for a label on mileage and abrasion</li></ul>
<b>Textiles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of Regulation on <b>ecodesign for washing machines and washer-dryers (2025)</b> to consider requirements for reducing micro-plastics, such as filters</li><li>• <b>Textile Strategy, Textile labelling regulation</b></li><li>• <b>Revision of the Waste Framework Directive (EPR and modulated fees)</b></li><li>• <b>Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation</b></li></ul>
<b>Detergent capsules</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Revision of Detergents Regulation</b></li></ul>
<b>Geotextiles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Revision of Construction Products Regulation</b></li></ul>

# Tackling pellet losses

- 3 main actors in pellets value chain: producers, converters & logistics
  - Pellet **losses throughout value chain** because of *handling*
- Industry voluntary certification scheme (**OCS - Operation Clean Sweep**)
  - Analysis ongoing to determine whether industry's scheme is sufficient
- SME survey: mandatory measures acceptable **if lighter requirements for SMEs**

# Conclusion

- 1) EU political commitment to tackle microplastic pollution
- 2) Planned REACH restriction on intentionally added microplastics
- 3) Ongoing work to evaluate benefits of additional legislation for unintentional releases  
→ legislative proposal & communication for Q2 2023

refuse



share



reuse



return  
&  
collect



sort



recycle



*Learn more about plastics and the circular economy:*

[Circular economy action plan \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu) & [Plastics \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)



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