

## U.S. News

# In a First, California Plans to Clean Up Microplastics: California Today

By LIVIA ALBECK-RIPKA

The state has adopted a strategy to monitor and reduce the ubiquitous form of pollution.

They are in your gut. They are in the ocean. They are even floating through the air in the most remote regions of the West. Microplastics — fragments of broken-down plastic no larger than a fraction of an inch — have become a colossal global problem.

California wants to fix that.

Last month, the state became the first in the nation to adopt a strategy addressing the scourge of tiny detritus. "We need to eliminate our addiction to single-use plastics," said Mark Gold, the executive director of the Ocean Protection Council, the governmental body that approved the plan.

The strategy is not regulatory, but the council has committed to spending \$3 million this year, with reduction targets laid out between now and 2030. Gold added, "You find microplastics everywhere you look."

By some estimates, humans have manufactured about 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic, only nine percent of which has ever been recycled. About 11 million metric tons of this plastic end up in the ocean every year, and without intervention, this number is expected to triple by 2040, according to the council. When these plastics break down, they can be eaten by marine animals, stunting their growth and causing reproductive problems. They have also been found in human organs, including placentas, as well as in soils and plants.

California's strategy is part of a global effort to address this problem. Last week, representatives from 175 nations agreed to begin work on a legally binding treaty that would commit them to recycling and cleanup measures, as well as curbs on plastic production. The treaty, supporters say, would be the most important environmental accord since the

2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

At the local level, California's strategy primarily aims to do two things: First, prevent plastics from entering the environment. Second, monitor those that are already out there.

The first step, Gold said, is reducing or ultimately eliminating the worst culprits, including single-use plastics, synthetic fabrics, cigarette filters and car tires. Research from 2019 showed that nearly half of the microplastics polluting California's coastal waters were rubber fragments probably shed from vehicle tires, making them the largest single contributor to the problem.

The strategy also sets goals to improve storm water systems to catch the pollutants before they reach the ocean. "The thing about microplastics is if they get into the ocean environment, they are there to stay," Gold said.

The plan also commits to monitoring levels of microplastics in California's waters, just as the state monitors the level of harmful particulate matter in the air, which can often increase during events like wildfires. Such a program would be among the first to consistently monitor these pollutants in the environment.

It also sets goals to research where the majority of the microplastics are coming from, and how much risk each kind poses to the health of humans and aquatic life. Though scientists agree that plastic pollution is a blight, little is known about exactly how it affects us.

"The evidence of harm is not the same as the evidence of presence," said Britta Denise Hardesty, a principal scientist with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, an Australian science agency, and an expert on microplastics, who is not involved in the plan. She added, "It's awesome that California is doing this."

A sensible state strategy, she added, was far more likely to succeed than some previous efforts, including a giant boom that set sail into the Pacific Ocean in September

2018 with plans to remove 150,000 pounds of plastic from the ocean in a year. "You couldn't design something to be more costly and less likely to succeed," Hardesty told me.

The vessel returned several months later, in pieces.

The hope is that California — the state with the largest economy and among the best environmental protections in the nation — can forge ahead in reducing the harm of microplastics, even if it can't solve the problem on its own, Gold, the Ocean Protection Council executive, told me.

"We're California, we lead by example; it's in our DNA," he said, adding: "We don't want to wake up in five years and find out this is absolutely devastating to our marine ecology, and we didn't do anything."

### For more:

- Last week, representatives from 175 nations agreed to begin writing a global treaty that would restrict the explosive growth of plastic pollution.
- Sending a giant boom into the ocean to clean up the Great Pacific Garbage Patch was probably a bad idea, Vox reports.
- A study in 2020 showed you're probably inhaling microplastics right now.

### The rest of the news

- Housing law: California lawmakers are trying again to get rid of the nation's only law that lets voters veto public housing projects, The Associated Press reports.
- Trucker protest: A convoy that departed from California last month encircled the nation's capital on Sunday in protest of Covid mandates.
- Jury rules in favor of officers: Two Huntington Beach police officers did not use excessive force when they shot and killed a man in 2017, a jury ruled on Friday. Read more from The Associated Press.

- Arts review: A Los Angeles troupe in search of choreographic vision.

- Basketball: Tony Bland, a former U.S.C. assistant coach who was arrested in 2017 as part an F.B.I. investigation, is now coaching at a Los Angeles-area high school. He still hopes he can return to the college level.

- L.A. councilman spending: Joe Buscaino, a Los Angeles city councilman who is running for mayor, has spent tens of thousands of dollars from his officeholder account on family trips, The Los Angeles Times reports.

- Fake kidnapping: A woman from Redding was arrested on felony charges for faking her own abduction.

- Theranos show: The women of “The Dropout,” a new Hulu show, want to humanize the former Silicon Valley darling Elizabeth Holmes.

- Day care crash: Last Thursday, 14 children were taken to hospitals for precautionary reasons after a car crashed into a day care in Anderson, CNN reports.

- Berkeley admissions: The group behind U.C. Berkeley’s limit on enrollment offered to allow 1,000 additional students, but the university declined, The Associated Press reports.

- Church shooting: A man who killed his three daughters, a chaperone and himself this week used an unregistered “ghost gun,” The Associated Press reports.

#### **What we’re eating**

These garlic noodles cross cultures, but are deeply San Franciscan.

#### **Where we’re traveling**

Today’s tip comes from Caitlin Rodriguez, who recommends a drive along

#### **State Route 150:**

“One of my favorite things to do in the tri-county area (Ventura, Santa Barbara, and L.A. counties) is to go for drives and explore the mountain, agricultural, and ocean sceneries of the area.

My all time favorite drive is to drive along the 150, a mountain highway that goes through the small, agricultural town of Santa Paula, up to upper Ojai, and down into the Ojai valley. I always stop at Steckel Park on the outskirts of Santa Paula where there is a small aviary and wild peacocks roaming around. As you can hear the call of the peacocks in the distance, you can visit with the very friendly Cockatoo who likes to bring you sticks for a good head scratching. He really makes it hard to leave. Continuing up the 150, a great place to stop for lunch is a burger joint called the Summit or after enjoying the scenic drive all the way down into the Ojai valley, there are several places to enjoy great food in Ojai.

After lunch, you can hop back on the 33 and head down into Ventura where you can end the drive at the uncrowded, local Ventura beaches.”

Tell us about your favorite places to visit in California. Email your suggestions to [CAToday@nytimes.com](mailto:CAToday@nytimes.com). We’ll be sharing more in upcoming editions of the newsletter.

#### **What we’re recommending**

The artist Josh Kline imagines an unmoored life in the post-climate-change future.

#### **Tell us**

Join The Times for a free online event on Wednesday with two of the nation’s

most prominent Covid-19 experts.

Dr. Bob Wachter and Dr. Monica Gandhi, both at the University of California, San Francisco, have worked throughout the pandemic to explain the risks of Covid-19. And often, they have disagreed.

See event details here.

#### **And before you go, some good news**

In a recent column, The Financial Times’s Janan Ganesh beautifully argued a point that I’ve long struggled to articulate: Los Angeles is a great walking city.

Ganesh wrote that the standard walkability rankings overlook the wonder of Los Angeles by overemphasizing distances and convenience:

“The more basic test is whether there is enough on the streets to see in the first place. Missing that point is how Washington comes to rank above Istanbul, and Munich above Bangkok. Being efficient and well put-together is prized over the one thing a city cannot design or buy: life, whether in its smile-raising or stomach-turning forms. Susan Sontag wrote that the urban wanderer must be on the search for ‘voluptuous extremes.’ That isn’t Bordeaux.

No western city of comparable heft is weirder or more random than L.A.”

Thanks for starting your week with us. We’ll be back tomorrow.

P.S. Here’s today’s Mini Crossword, and a clue: Equivalent note to C sharp (5 letters).

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