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# Sunscreen ban could be expanded

Sunscreens containing two harmful petrochemicals, avobenzone and octocrylene, would be banned from sale in Hawaii under a bill passed Tuesday by the state Senate.

This bill follows a 2018 law banning oxybenzone and octinoxate sunscreens. The Center for Biological Diversity reported studies show that all four of these petrochemical sunscreens are toxic to human health, coral reefs and marine species.

“This is great news for our imperiled coral reefs and marine life,” said Maxx Phillips, Hawaii director and staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The center said it has petitioned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for a national ban on coral-killing chemicals in sunscreens.

Research demonstrates that octocrylene can disrupt human hormones and have toxic impacts on a variety of aquatic organisms, including corals, fish and marine mammals. The center said a soon-to-be published study shows that octocrylene degrades into benzophenone, a powerful carcinogen, reproductive disruptor and herbicide.

Avobenzone is also an endocrine disruptor and can reduce coral resilience against the high ocean temperatures that are killing corals worldwide through global warming.

“Studies show fish exposed to octocrylene exhibited endocrine disruption, brain deformities in larvae and reproductive toxicity,” said ecotoxicologist Craig Downs. “Because octocrylene bioaccumulates, what does that mean for people eating these fish, especially pregnant women and keiki? Avobenzone may cause a dysfunction with the powerhouse of the cell, which may kill cells and induce a bleaching effect in corals.”

Coral reefs are critical ecosystems for Hawaii, protecting its shorelines, entertaining thousands of snorkelers and divers each year, and providing a safe environment for many fish and other aquatic species. Approximately one quarter of the plants, fish and invertebrates found in Hawaiian coral reefs are endemic to Hawaii.

Coral reefs are intrinsic to Hawaiian culture and fundamental to the fabric of local communities. They provide critical habitat for near-shore marine life and natural protection against coastal erosion and sea-level rise.

“Evolving science shows that these persistent reef toxins disrupt the life-cycles of corals and other marine life,” said Lisa Bishop, president of Friends of Hanauma Bay. “Eminent scientists from the U.S., Canada, France, Israel, Iran and China joined over 100 Hawaii residents, organizations and businesses supporting the bill. Hawaiian coral reefs also drive tourism, one of Hawaii’s primary economic engines. It is therefore critical to eliminate as many existential threats to our marine ecosystems as possible, like these additional reef-toxic chemicals, to ensure the reef can both survive and thrive for future generations. Although reef-toxic petrochemical sunscreens are not the only threat to Hawaii’s marine environment, they are one serious local threat that everyone can help eliminate right now.”

Experts say the best protection from midday sun is staying in the shade or wearing hats and covering clothing. Sunscreens containing the minerals zinc oxide or titanium dioxide do not wash off as easily in water as petrochemical ones, so they may provide better protection while not harming reefs.

If enacted into law, the Senate bill (SB 132) would ban the sale of sunscreens containing octocrylene and avobenzone starting on Jan. 1, 2023.