

Press release: Government launches microplastics research to protect oceans

A new research project analysing the impact of tyres and clothing on the marine environment has been launched today by the Government.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey has pledged £200,000 for scientists at the University of Plymouth to explore how tiny plastic particles from tyres, synthetic materials like polyester, and fishing gear – such as nets, ropes and lines – enter our waterways and oceans, and the impact they have on marine life.

Following the government's ban on microbeads, which is one of the toughest in the world, this comprehensive research will be used to improve our scientific understanding of how microplastics from other sources enter the oceans – whether through fibres released into waste water during a washing cycle, or car tyre friction on roads creating a dust of particles that make their way into the seas through sewers.

The 11 month project will build on the research already underway – with some scientists estimating tyres contribute 270,000 tonnes of plastics per year while a single wash load of acrylic clothing could release over 700,000 microfibrils into the ocean.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

The impact of plastic pollution on our oceans is one of the greatest environmental challenges of our generation. The UK is already leading the way in this area, but we want to go further – and faster.

Robust scientific evidence should support our policy proposals, and through this exciting project we will build on work underway to better understand how microplastics end up in marine environment and what we can do to tackle this in the future.

The project is being led by Professor Richard Thompson OBE, who oversaw Defra's first research project on microplastics and their impact on the marine environment, which led to the UK's pioneering ban on microbeads in rinse-off cosmetics and personal care products coming into force this year.

The International Marine Litter Research Unit at the University of Plymouth is at the global forefront of research into the causes and effects of marine litter and recently conducted research into the effectiveness of fibre-trapping bags in washing machines.

Professor Richard Thompson OBE, Head of the International Marine Litter Research Unit, said:

The types of microplastics entering the marine environment are incredibly diverse, but recent estimates in Norway and Sweden have suggested that particles of tyre and debris from the road surface could be a substantial source.

With very limited real data available to confirm the impact from these sources, there is a genuine and pressing need to establish the true scale of this issue. By combining this with an assessment of the quantities of microplastic from synthetic textiles, we can develop a more complete picture on the relative importance of various sources.

We will be able to use our findings to work with the Government, scientists and industry to try to prevent these particles entering the marine environment in the future.

This project will build on the substantial research already underway on marine plastic pollution and the impact of human activities on the marine environment. It will be used to guide future policy priorities as the Government continues in its fight against the scourge of plastics.

This includes the 5p plastic bag charge – which has led to 9 billion fewer bags distributed – and last month’s pledge to introduce a deposit return scheme for single use drinks containers, subject to consultation, and recent plans to end the sale of plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds.

It sits alongside the 25 Year Environment Plan commitment to eliminate avoidable plastic waste and the Treasury’s call for evidence on how charges and changes to the tax system could be used to reduce single use plastics.

Just last month the health of the oceans was on the agenda at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, where the Prime Minister called for collective global action in the fight against plastic pollution through the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance.

[Guidance: CCTV in slaughterhouses: rules for operators](#)

Updated: We have made some minor editorial changes to the document, clarify a few issues people have asked us about.

Tells slaughterhouse operators in England how to comply with the rules which came into force on 4 May 2018. The rules require them to install and operate a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) system, keep CCTV images for 90 days, and make the images available to inspectors.

[News story: LLWR launching campaign to highlight equality, diversity and inclusivity issues in workplace](#)

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (ED&I) message is being embraced by LLW Repository Ltd (LLWR) with a series of initiatives planned to run alongside a new NDA campaign to increase awareness of the issue.

LLWR is launching an anti-bullying campaign in addition to highlighting mental health issues, and an employee focus group has been formed to provide feedback on progress.

The organisation has appointed its first Carers Champion to advise those who double up as carers for family or friends, and ran a State of Mind day, utilising former stars of rugby league, focused on mental health matters.

“We’ve got off to a strong start and have drawn up an action plan to guide the campaign, but there is much still to do,” said Dave Rossiter, LLWR’s ED&I Champion.

“ED&I is about making all our people feel included, giving them equality of opportunity and contributing to an adaptive and improving working environment.

“We will utilise all the tools at our disposal to ensure the message gets out to our workforce. That includes our new website, social media, a fresh section on our intranet, newsletter and new digital signage installed in March to keep everyone up to date with developments.

“We are in this for the long haul and will have further announcements soon on additional workplace initiatives.”

The NDA last year carried out a survey on ED&I attitudes across the estate and a follow up later this year will assess progress.

Sharon Langan, HR Manager, said: “We don’t see this as a one year campaign, it’s an ongoing issue.

“We are launching the ED&I campaign with posters, lanyards and new mugs for everyone printed with the ED&I logo so that our people get familiar with it

and understand what it stands for.

“There will be a series of posters being displayed over the next two months across the company to address what ED&I is and what it means for everyone.

“Our bullying and harassment campaign will follow on from this. We will also be looking at mental health during this period and ways in which we can help people talk more openly about their issues.”

Research and analysis: Sharing resources with the Fire and Rescue Service during air quality incidents

This project explored how the Environment Agency and the Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) might collaborate and coordinate use of their resources to produce better air quality information during major incidents. Major incidents such as large fires or accidental chemical releases can lead to toxic material entering the atmosphere.

As a result, the Environment Agency and the FRS now have a clearer understanding of each other's roles and capabilities, which will enable even closer collaboration in future.

Independent report: Farm Inspection and Regulation Review

Updated: We have published the interim report from this review.

The interim report sets out possible new approaches to regulating farming. We expect that the review will finish by the end of December 2018 and that we will publish a final report then.

The Secretary of State commissioned a review to identify opportunities to improve farming-related regulation and enforcement (including farm inspections). The review will apply only to England. The review began in March 2018 and is being chaired by Dame Glenys Stacey. She is supported by a small working group.

The terms of reference set out the scope of the review, and explains how the review will report.