

Letter to Editor: Dangers of plastic pollution

Keith Davis

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To the Editor:

According to the Sustainable Maine Project (nrcm.org), half of the 8.3 billion tons of plastic manufactured on the planet was produced in the last 13 years, and a family of four uses 1,500 plastic bags a year. Only nine percent of these bags are recycled, the rest end up in landfills or left to drift across the land and sea.

Abby Barrows, based in her hometown of Stonington, studied microplastics and microfibers that end up in the ocean while a graduate student at College of the Atlantic.

Collaborating with Dr. Chris Petersen, a marine biology professor at COA, and the research group Adventure Scientists (adventurescientists.org), Barrows led a multi-year, citizen-science study to sample marine environments worldwide.

The research showed microfibers in all of the oceans, from the coast to the middle of the open ocean. Other researchers have shown that microplastics are ingested by small marine animals and make their way up the oceanic food chain, impacting wildlife, and threatening drinking water supplies. Other studies have found microplastic particles in autopsied whales, and micro-synthetic fiber particles are detected in 83 percent of lobster samples.

Faced with these kinds of statistics, many Maine municipalities have eliminated single-use carryout shopping bags and Styrofoam food take-out containers, and several other towns are considering doing likewise.

Southwest Harbor and 14 other Maine communities have taken steps to reduce single-use plastic shopping bags and encourage customers to bring their own reusable, durable, washable bags.

Some town ordinances require grocery stores to charge a five-cent fee, or more, for a paper bag, while other ordinances give stores the option to add a fee per paper or plastic bag. The proposed ordinances for Bar Harbor would simply require a ban and no fee, and also provide a grace period until Dec. 2019 for retailers to deplete their inventory of plastic shopping bags or foam containers.

Citizens and governments here and around the world are learning about the risk from exposure to toxic microplastics and writing to propose solutions we all can adopt. Surely using reusable bags is a small contribution we all can make.

Keith Davis

Bar Harbor