

MJPhD

ILLUMINATING MICROPLASTICS : *EFFORTS TO BRING CITIZEN SCIENCE TO THE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM*

MARK JONES
CREATIVE DIRECTOR
MJPHD, LLC

7 October 2025



Dwayne told me to tell my story. It is a story with several twists and turns. It all began with something Canadian.

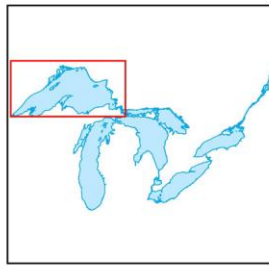


These are syenite, likely from near Marathon, ON.
They contain sodalite with some sulfide content.
Transported by glaciers, I find them in Michigan,
at night.



visible light

Lake Superior Watershed



Legend

- Cities/Towns
- State Borders
- Rivers
- - - International Border
- Lake Superior Watershed
- Diversions



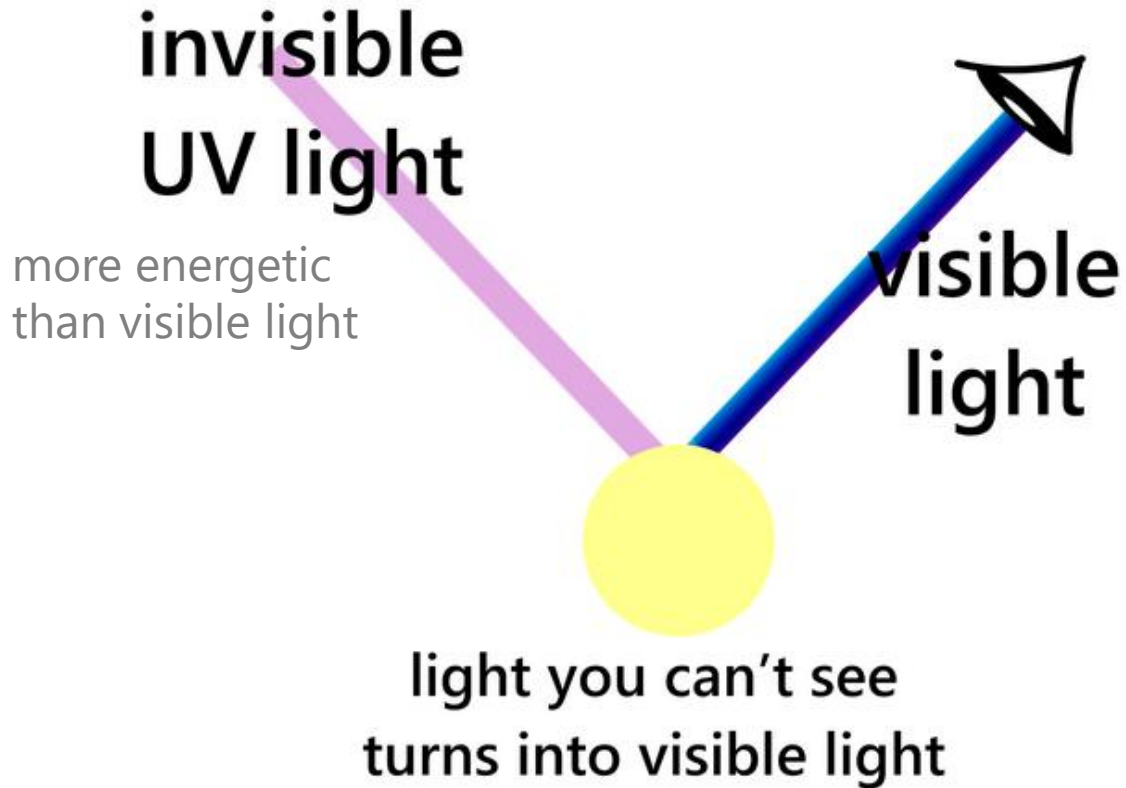
The filter is important. It gets rid of stray visible light making fluorescence much easier to see.



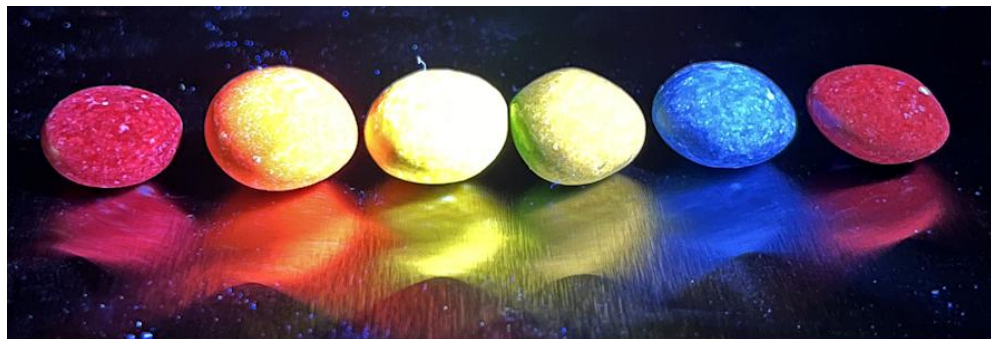


UV light
(365 nm filtered)

FLUORESCENCE



UV



white light



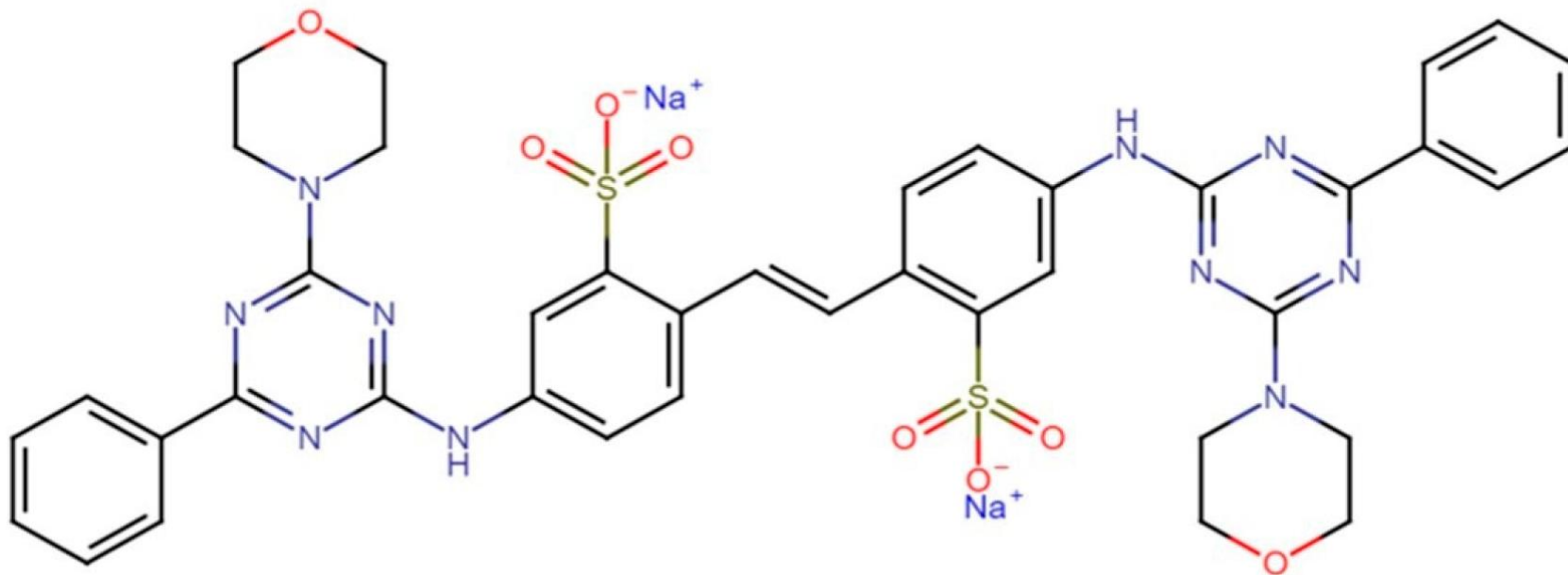


visible light

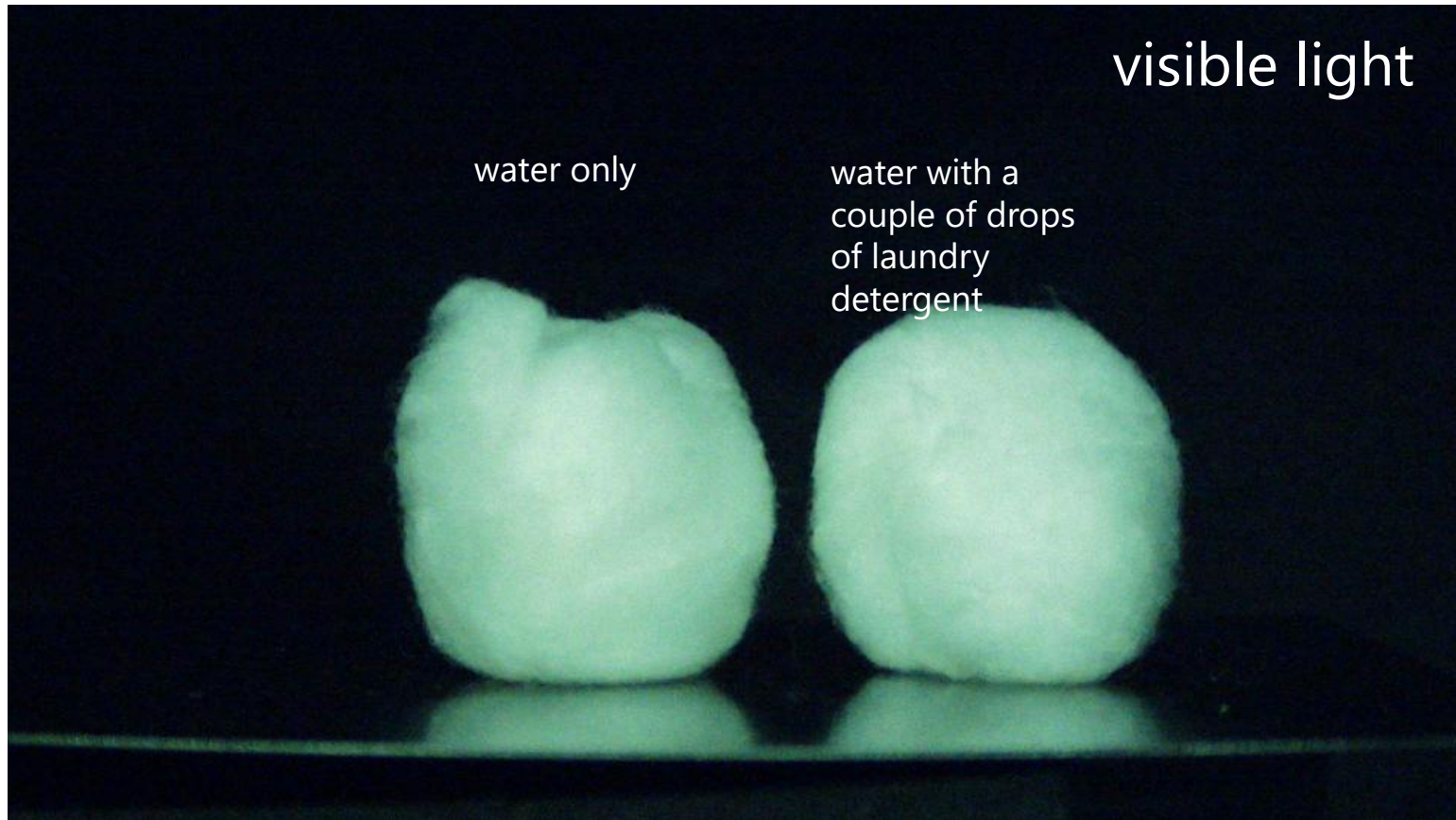


UV light

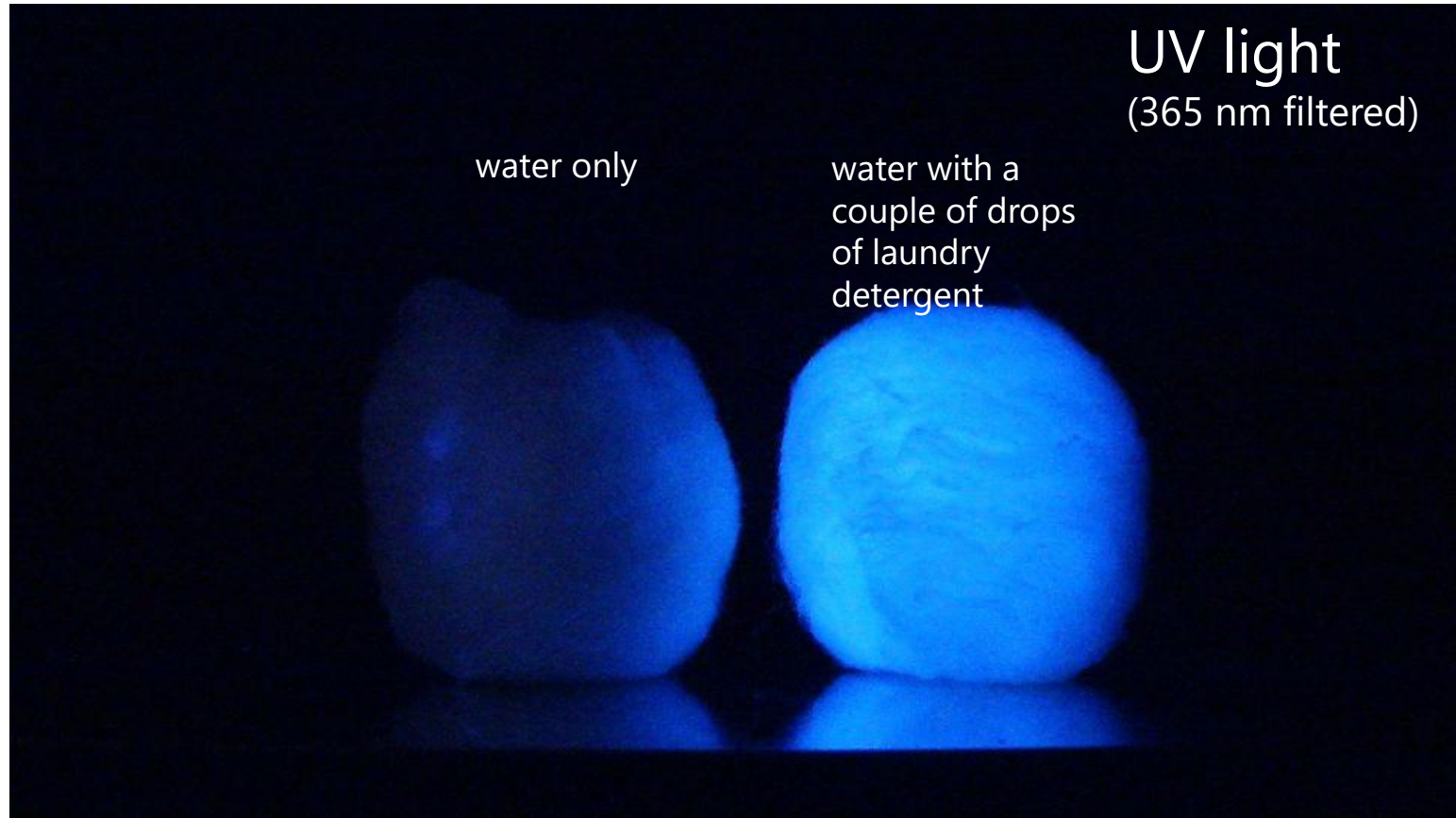
OPTICAL BRIGHTENERS



OPTICAL BRIGHTENERS

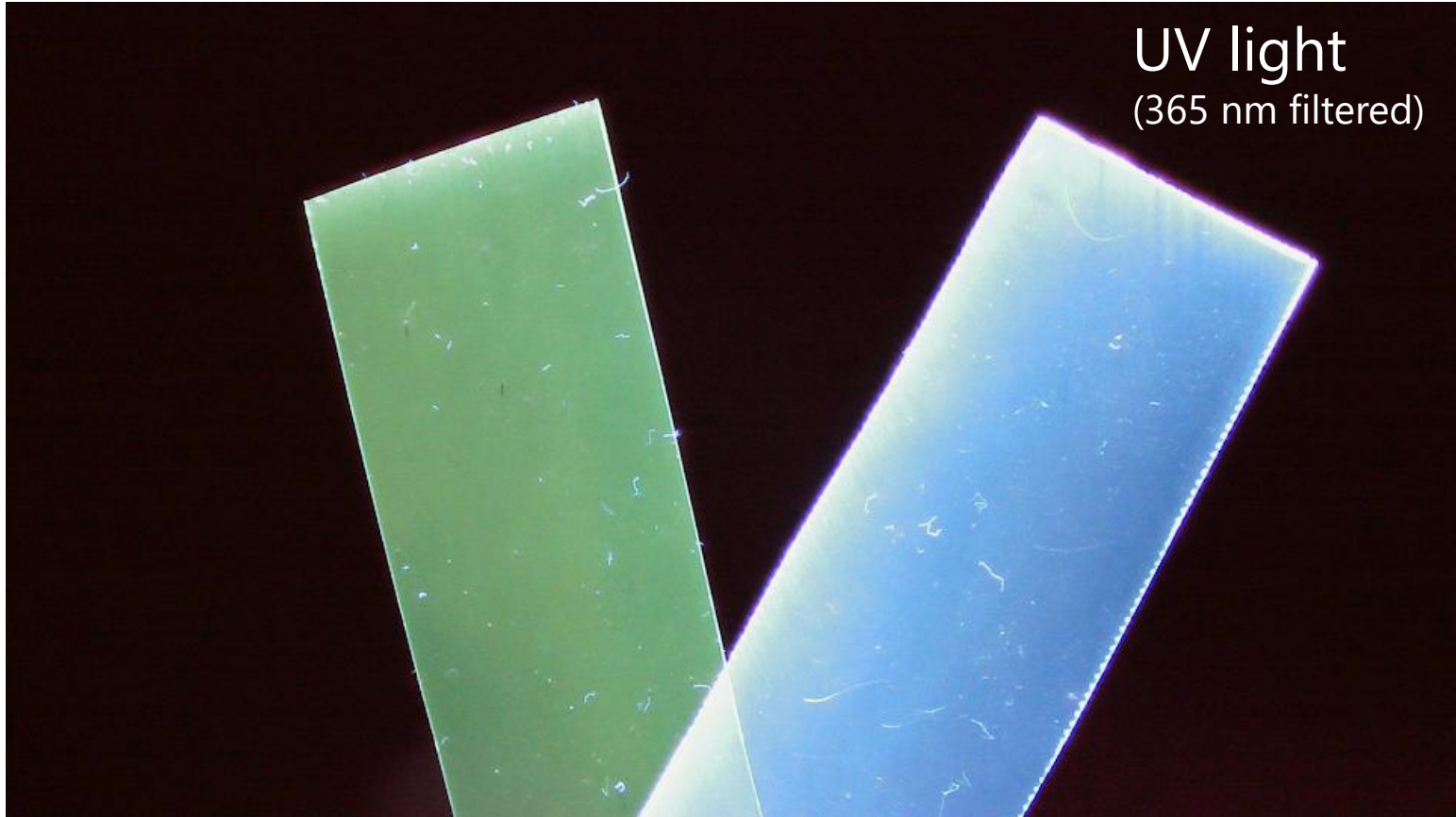


OPTICAL BRIGHTENERS





UV light
(365 nm filtered)



OBX BEACH SAND



OBX BEACH SAND



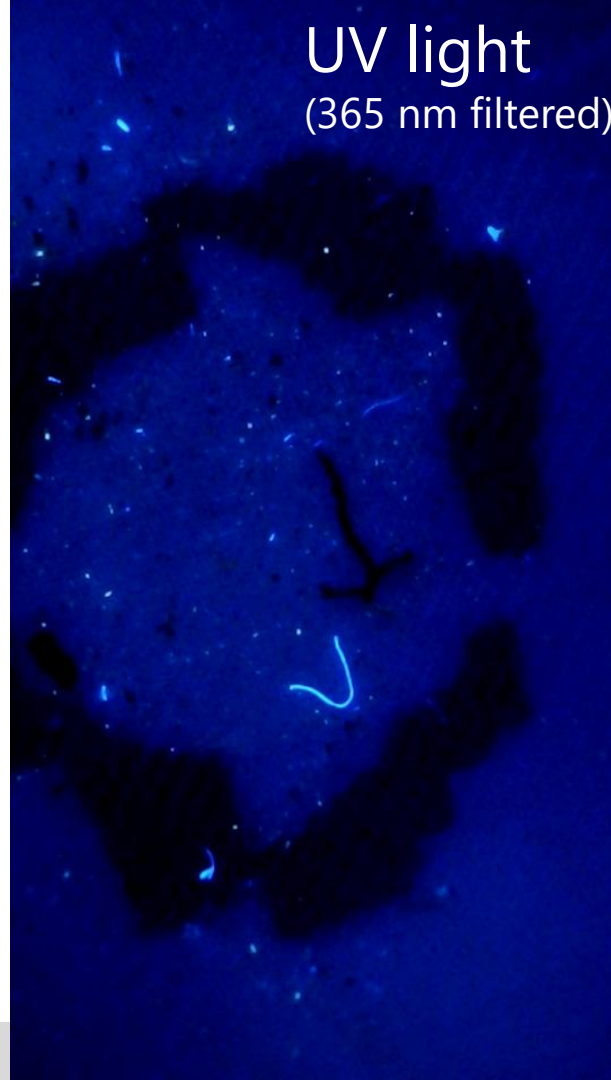
OBX BEACH SAND



visible light



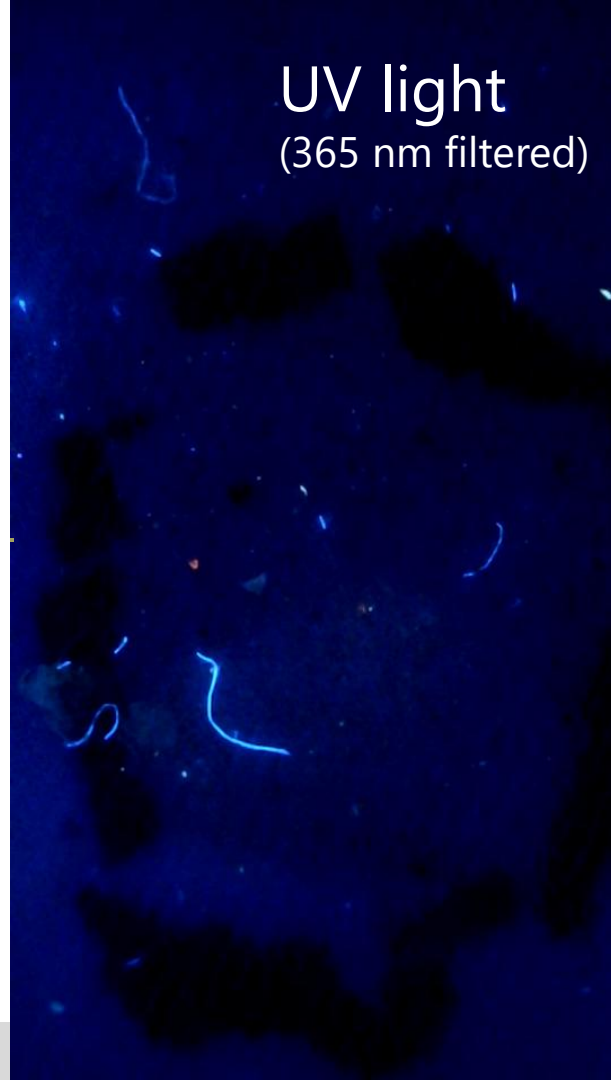
UV light
(365 nm filtered)



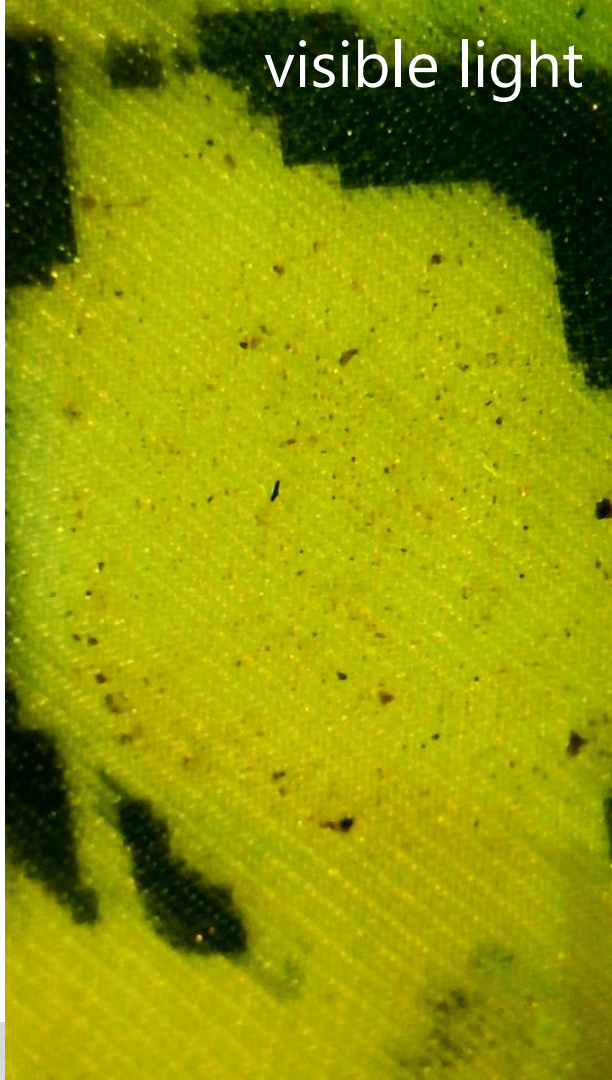
visible light



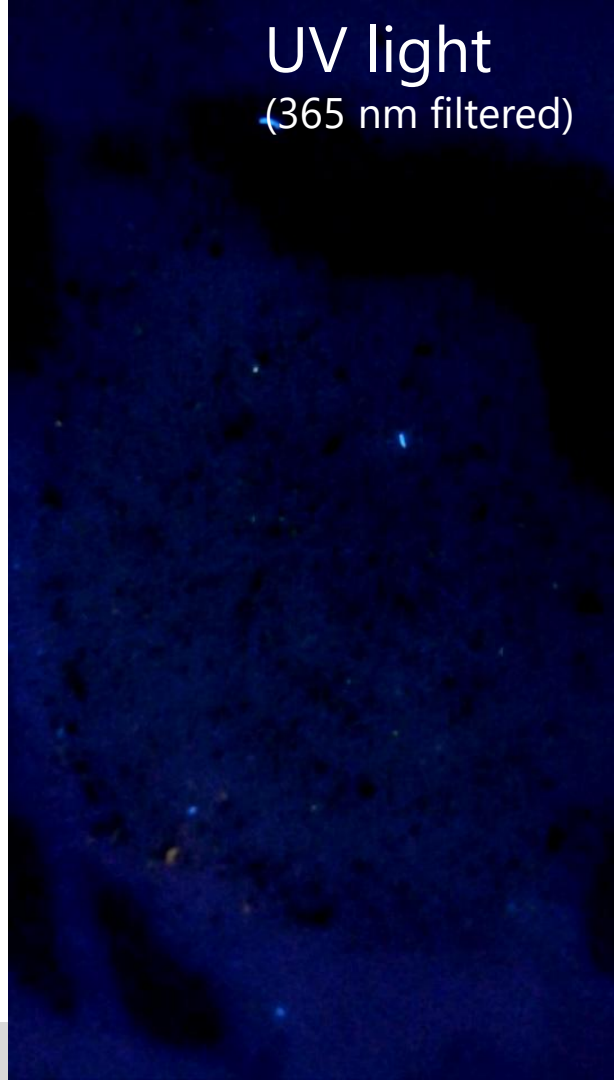
UV light
(365 nm filtered)



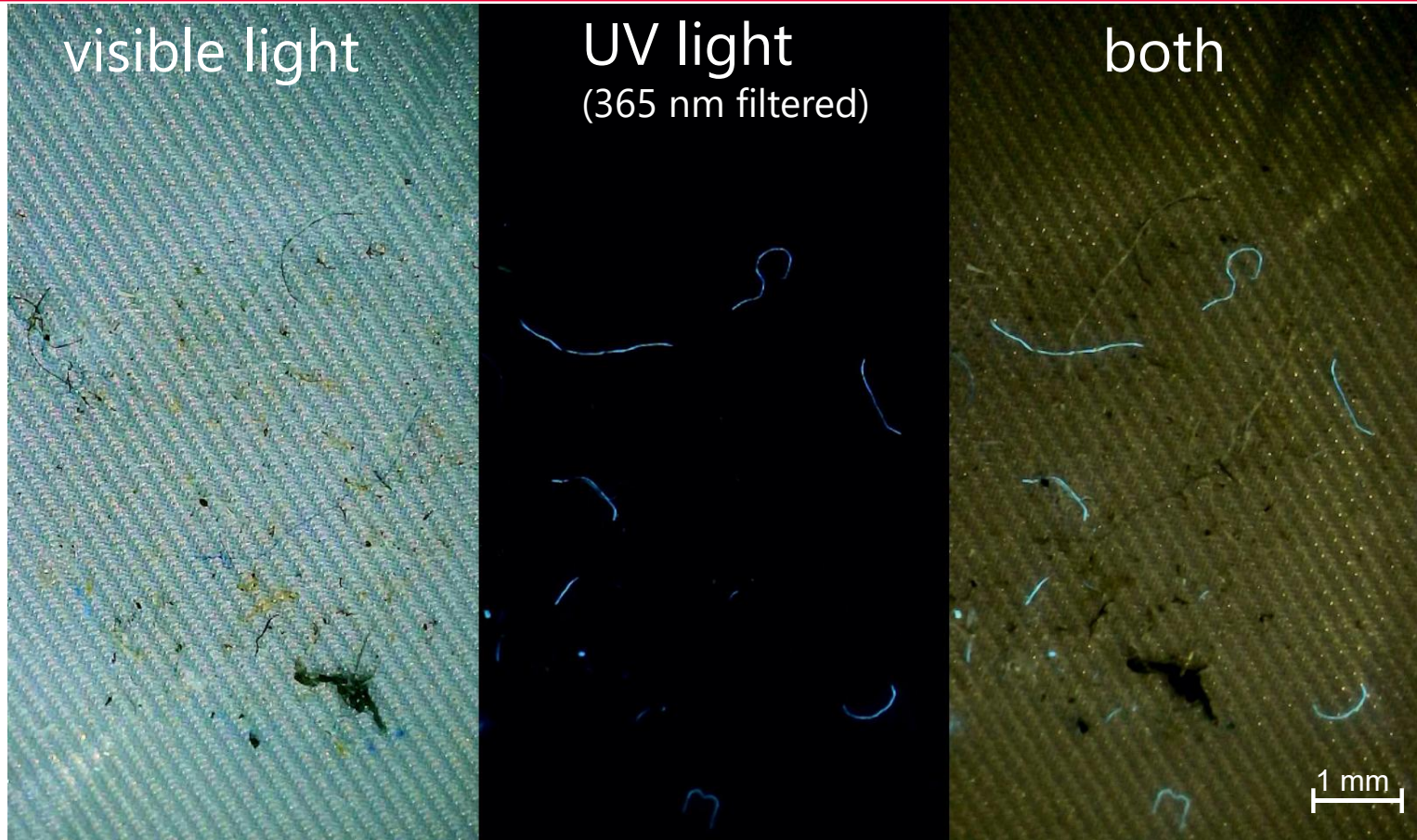
visible light



UV light
(365 nm filtered)



FRESHLY FALLEN SNOW – 18 FEBRUARY





UV light
filter



Midland Local Section



CENTRAL
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Water Chemistry in the Great Lakes Region

<https://www.cmich.edu/academics/colleges/college-science-engineering/centers/cmu-biological-station/h2o-q-in-the-classroom>



Get a sample of water.

Filter out the small particles.

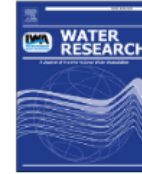
View/count the particles.



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Water Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/watres



Review

Microplastics in freshwaters and drinking water: Critical review and assessment of data quality

Albert A. Koelmans^{a,*}, Nur Hazimah Mohamed Nor^a, Enya Hermesen^a, Merel Kooi^a,
Svenja M. Mintenig^{b,c}, Jennifer De France^{d,**}

^a Aquatic Ecology and Water Quality Management Group, Wageningen University, the Netherlands
^b Joint Research Institute for the Environment and Urbanization, the Netherlands
^c Watercycle Research Institute, Wageningen University, the Netherlands
^d World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, Switzerland

high quality data is difficult!

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 November 2018

Received in revised form

25 February 2019

Accepted 26 February 2019

Available online 28 February 2019

Keywords:

Microplastics

Drinking water

Waste water

Surface water

Human health

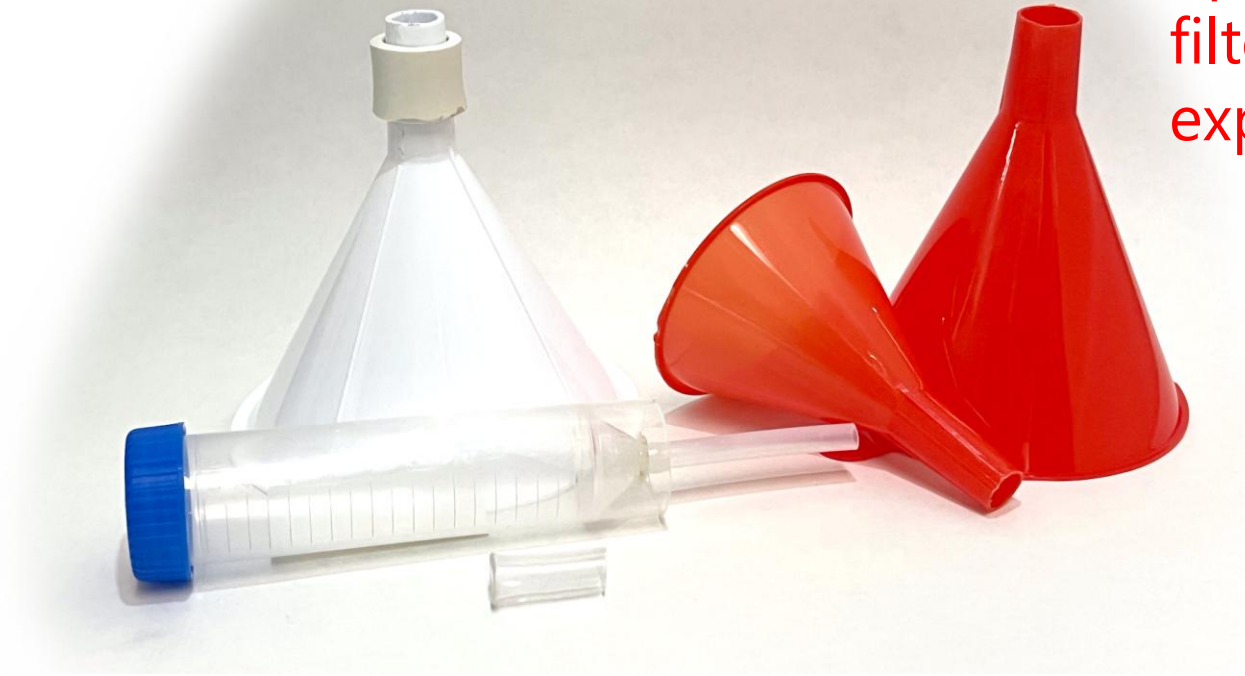
ABSTRACT

Microplastics have recently been detected in drinking water as well as in drinking water sources. This presence has triggered discussions on possible implications for human health. However, there have been questions regarding the quality of these occurrence studies since there are no standard sampling, extraction and identification methods for microplastics. Accordingly, we assessed the quality of fifty studies researching microplastics in drinking water and in its major freshwater sources. This includes an assessment of microplastic occurrence data from river and lake water, groundwater, tap water and bottled drinking water. Studies of occurrence in wastewater were also reviewed. We review and propose best practices to sample, extract and detect microplastics and provide a quantitative quality assessment of studies reporting microplastic concentrations. Further, we summarize the findings related to microplastic concentrations, polymer types and particle shapes. Microplastics are frequently present in freshwaters and drinking water, and number concentrations spanned ten orders of magnitude (1×10^{-2} to $10^8 \text{ \#}/\text{m}^3$) across individual samples and water types. However, only four out of 50 studies received positive scores for all assessed quality criteria, implying there is a significant need to improve quality.



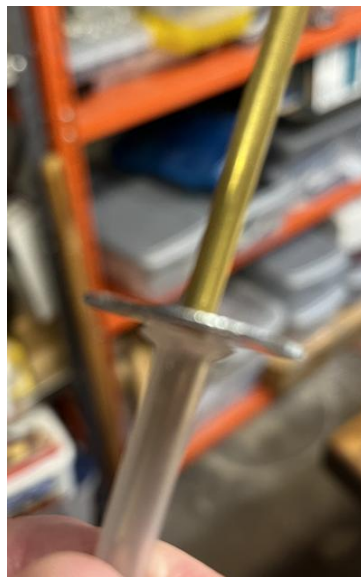
current
iteration
designed to
sample near
but not at
the surface

various
options for
filters
explored

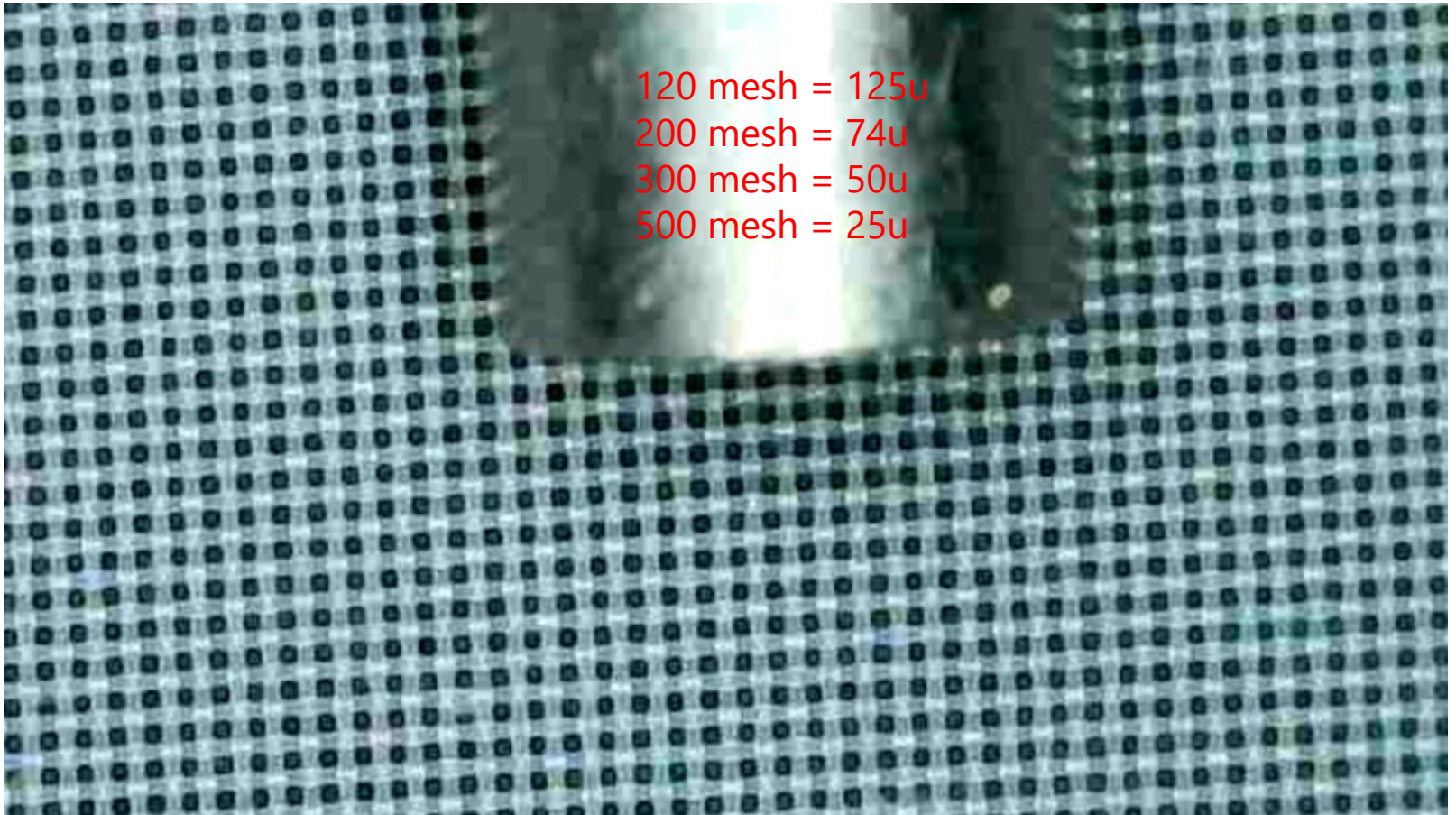


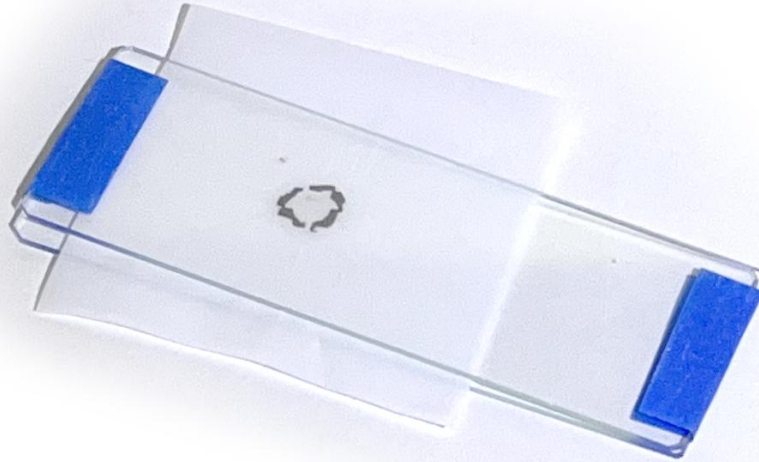


current
iteration
designed to
filter at
microscope
resolution



SILK SCREEN FABRIC AS FILTERS





slide
sandwich
showing
traced
outline of
funnel on
filter media

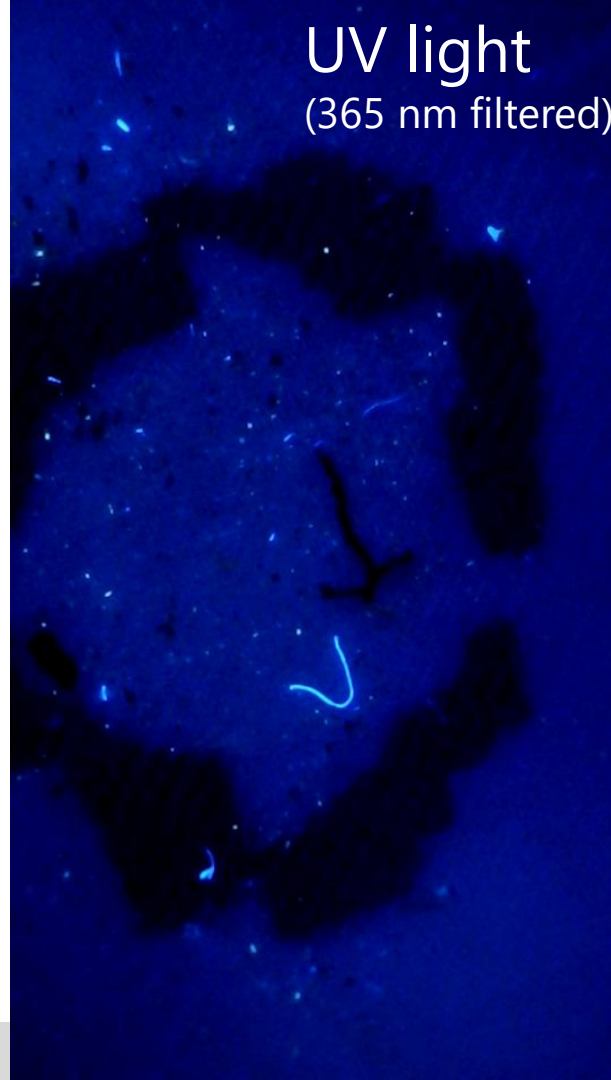
SAMPLING STEPS

- Use masking tape to make microscope slide sandwich leaving one side open
- Open slide sandwich
- Rinse funnel with sample
- Dry tip
- Pull filter mesh around tip
- Push retainer over fabric snugly ensuring outline doesn't move
- Pass 100 mL of water through funnel
- If filtering slows or doesn't flow, use syringe to pressurize
- Carefully remove retainer
- Place on filter paper to dry
- Put in on slide and close the sandwich
- Outline funnel tip on slide with marker

visible light



UV light
(365 nm filtered)





Thanks to Henry Lecaptain for 3D printing the filter holder.

FLAWS

- Speed at the expense of perfect accuracy
- Sampling challenges can dramatically shift results
- Fluorescence emphasizes some materials while ignoring others





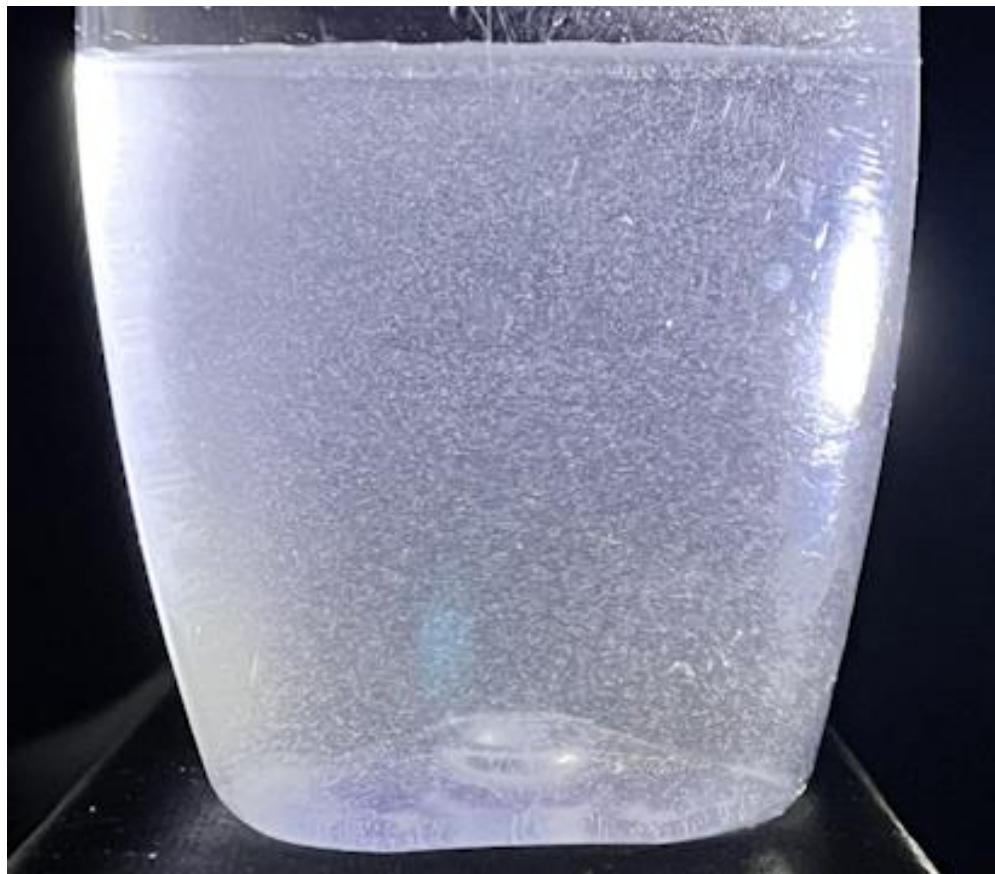
Tire Particles

13 March 2025

A glass jar is partially filled with a clear liquid. Inside the jar, a pink cylindrical object is suspended. The jar is placed on a blue surface. Overlaid on the image is the text "Making Microplastic Suspension" in a large, bold, white font with a black outline, and "small batch" in a smaller, bold, white font with a black outline below it.

Making Microplastic Suspension

small batch





Yellow Fluorescent PET

365 nm UV Light

Snow

17 March 2025



Finding new ways to look at the world can yield interesting results.

Plastic particles are everywhere.

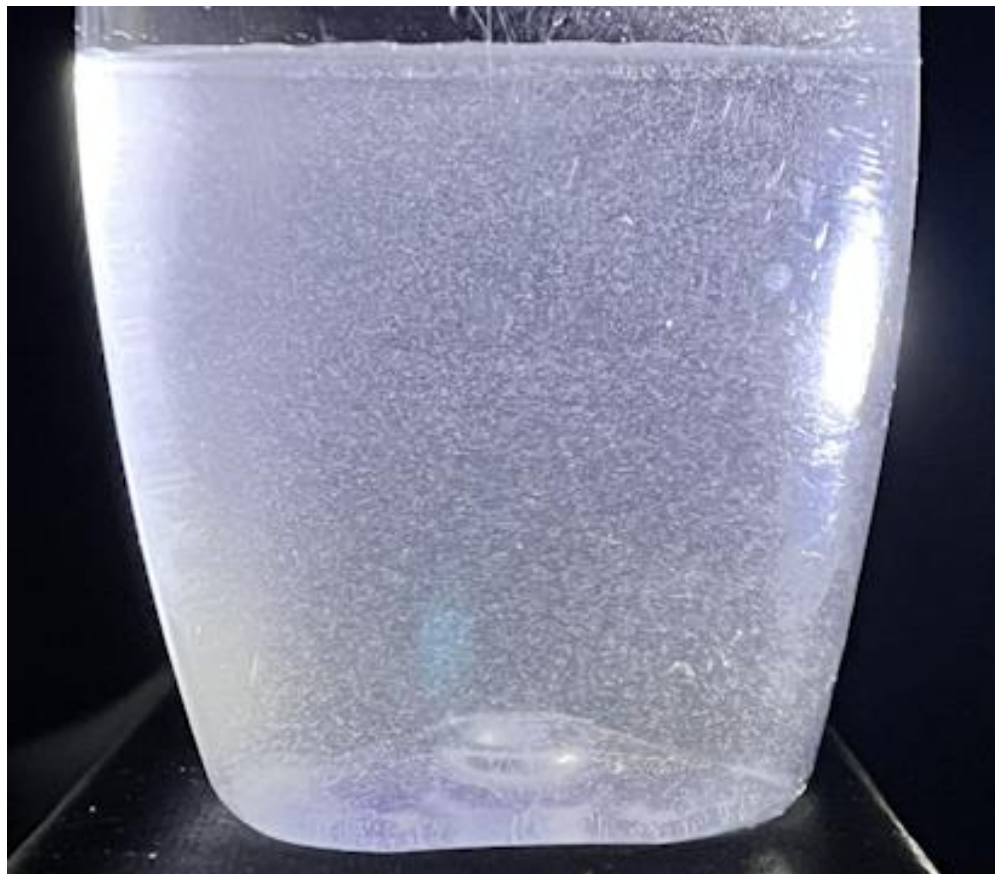
Sampling may help identify areas where something can be done.

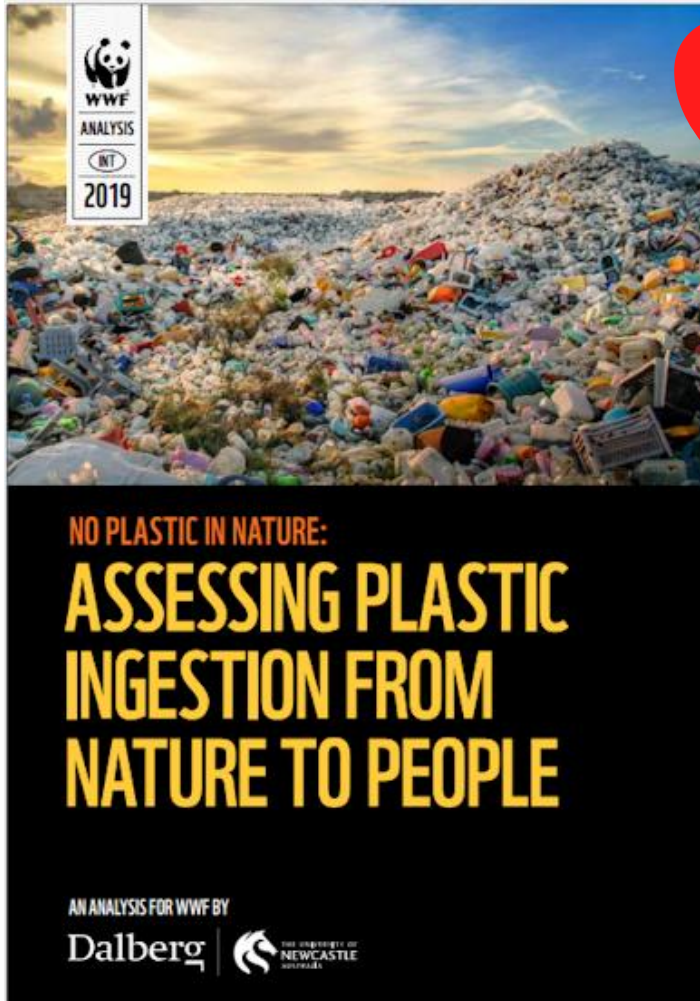
Microplastic Ingestion



Getting Flawed Paper
Retracted







A new study by the University of Newcastle, Australia suggests that an average person could be ingesting approximately 5 grams of plastic every week. The equivalent of a credit card's worth of microplastics. This summary report highlights the key ways plastic gets into our body, and what we can do about it.

wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/plastic_ingestion_web_spreads.pdf



It took
you up to
1 WEEK
to eat this
credit card



wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?348337/Revealed-plastic-ingestion-by-people-could-be-equating-to-a-credit-card-a-week



Newsroom

Future Students

Research and Innovation

The Conversation

Industry

International

Community and Alumni

Library

Current Students

Current Staff

College of Engineering, Science and Environment

College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing

College of Human and Social Futures

Pathways and Academic Learning Support Centre

Sustainable Development Goals

Plastic ingestion by people could be equating to a credit card a week

Wednesday, 12 June 2019

[Tweet](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

A new study finds on average people could be ingesting approximately 5 grams of plastic every week, which is the equivalent weight of a credit card.

The analysis *No Plastic in Nature: Assessing Plastic Ingestion from Nature to People* prepared by Dalberg, based on a study commissioned by WWF and carried out by University of Newcastle, Australia, suggests people are consuming about 2000 tiny pieces of plastic every week. That's approximately 21 grams a month, just over 250 grams a year.



Dr Thava Palanisami

The University of Newcastle is the first to combine data from over 50 studies on the ingestion of microplastic by people. The findings are an important step towards understanding the impact of plastic pollution on humans. It also further confirms the urgent need



REUTERS

World ▾

Business ▾

Markets ▾

Sustainability ▾

More ▾



World

You may be eating a credit card's worth of plastic each week - study

Reuters

June 11, 2019 9:29 PM EDT · Updated 5 years ago

Aa



www.reuters.com/article/us-environment-plastic/you-may-be-eating-a-credit-cards-worth-of-plastic-each-week-study-idUSKCN1TD009/



CNN

www.cnn.com/2019/06/11/health/microplastics-ingestion-wwf-study-scn-intl/index.html



per week

whole card = 5 g

per day



$1/7$ card = 710 mg

A pair of wooden chopsticks is shown diagonally, pointing towards the bottom center. The chopsticks are light brown with a natural wood grain. At the base of the chopsticks, there is a small black rectangular label with white text that reads "Valid 1/21".

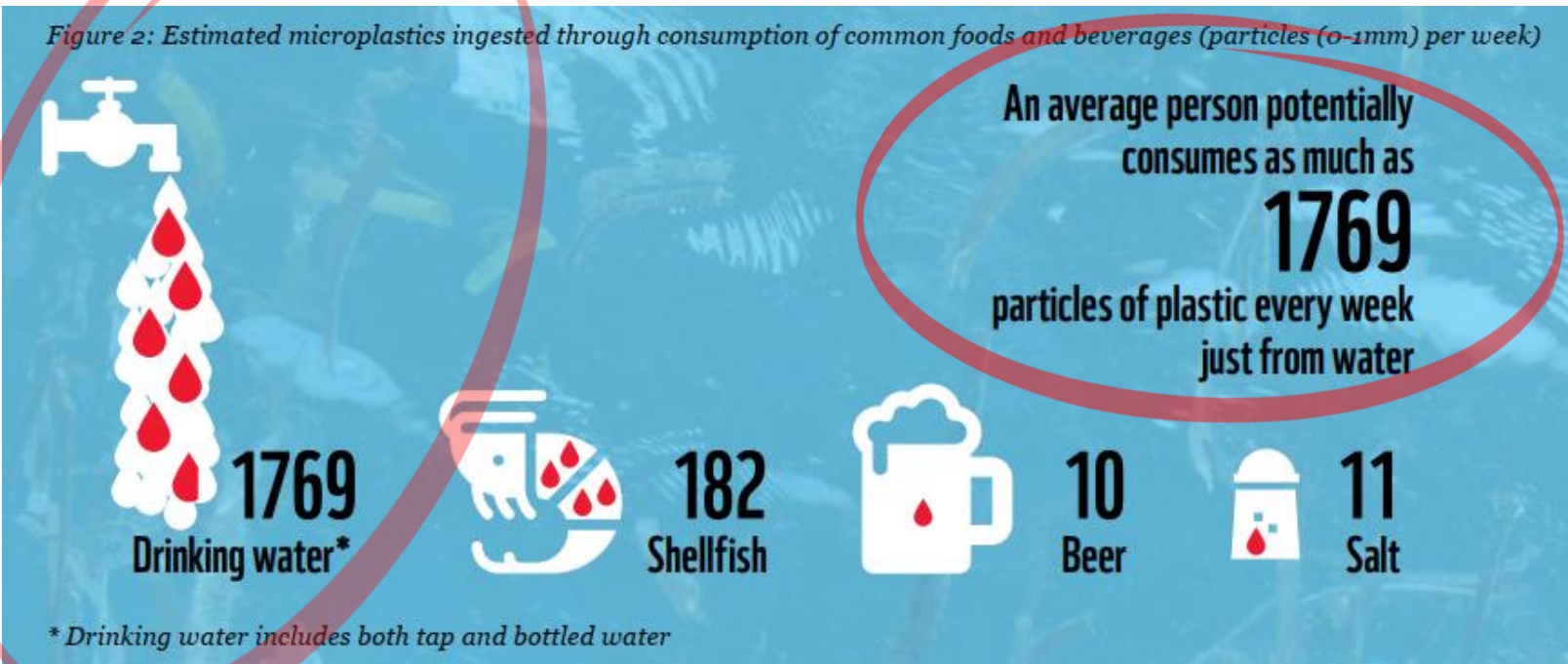
per meal

1/21 card = 240 mg



2.5 mg average particle to reach 5 grams.

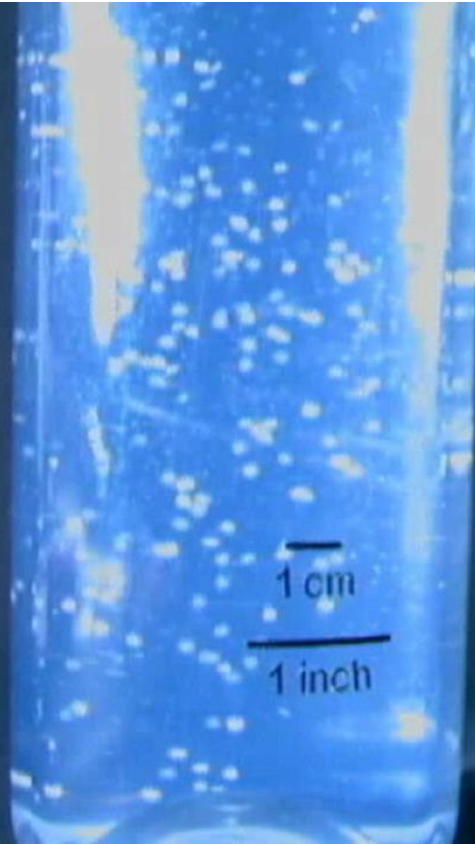
Figure 2: Estimated microplastics ingested through consumption of common foods and beverages (particles (0-1mm) per week)





Average 2.5 mg particles.

Plastic microparticles,
0.65 grams consisting of
523 particles, in a liter of
water equaling the
concentration in order to
ingest 5 grams per week.
Such a high
concentration is easily
seen both in water and
upon drying. The particles
are cut from 1.5 mm
plastic monofilament.





Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Hazardous Materials

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhazmat

Research paper

Estimation of the mass of microplastics ingested – A pivotal first step towards human health risk assessment

Kala Senathirajah^a, Simon Attwood^b, Geetika Bhagwat^c, Maddison Carbery^c, Scott Wilson^d, Thava Palanisami^{a,*}

^a Global Innovative Centre for Advanced Nanomaterials (GICAN), Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, The University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia

^b The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), 354 Tanglin Road, Singapore, Singapore

^c School of Environmental and Life Sciences, The University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia

^d Department of Environmental Science, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Exposure pathways
Human health
Ingestion
Microplastics
Plastic pollution
Risk

ABSTRACT

The ubiquitous presence of microplastics in the food web has been established. However, the mass of microplastics exposure to humans is not defined, impeding the human health risk assessment. Our objectives were to extract the data from the available evidence on the number and mass of microplastics from various sources, to determine the uncertainties in the existing data, to set future research directions, and derive a global average rate of microplastic ingestion to assist in the development of human health risk assessments and effective management and policy options. To enable the comparison of microplastics exposure across a range of sources, data extraction and standardization was coupled with the adoption of conservative assumptions. Following the analysis of data from fifty-nine publications, an average mass for individual microplastics in the 0–1 mm size range was calculated. Subsequently, we estimated that globally on average, humans may ingest 0.1–5 g of microplastics weekly through various exposure pathways. This was the first attempt to transform microplastic counts into a mass value relevant to human toxicology. The determination of an ingestion rate is fundamental to assess the human health risks of microplastic ingestion. These findings will contribute to future human health risk assessment frameworks.

“humans may ingest 0.1–5 g of microplastics weekly through various exposure pathways”

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhazmat.2020.124004>



Table 6

Summary of the annual average number of microplastics (particles) ingested (particles), and global average rate of microplastics ingested (g) per person per year.

Source of particles	ANMP _{ingested} (particles)	GARMi (0–1 mm)	GARMi (0–1 mm)	GARMi (0–1 mm)
		Scenario 1 (g)	Scenario 2 (g)	Scenario 3 (g)
Shellfish	9,445	26.4	0.0	0.0
Salt	565	1.6	7.4	14.2
Beer	523	1.46	0.3	0.5
Drinking water	91,994	257.5	0.0	0.0
Total (per year)	102,527	287.0	7.7	14.7
TOTAL (PER WEEK)	1,972	5.5	0.1	0.3



5 g

one model

0.1 g



0.02 credit cards worth

another model



an average person could
be ingesting approximately 5
grams of plastic every
week.



wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/plastic_ingestion_web_spreads.pdf



Lifetime Accumulation of Microplastic in Children and Adults

Nur Hazimah Mohamed Nor,* Merel Kooi, Noël J. Diepens, and Albert A. Koelmans



Cite This: *Environ. Sci. Technol.* 2021, 55, 5084–5096



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ACCESS |



Metrics & More

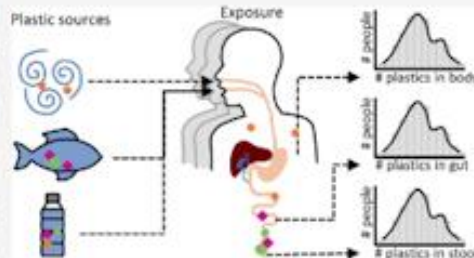


Article Recommendations



Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: Human exposure to microplastic is recognized as a global problem, but the uncertainty, variability, and lifetime accumulation are unresolved. We provide a probabilistic lifetime exposure model for children and adults, which accounts for intake via eight food types and inhalation, intestinal absorption, biliary excretion, and plastic-associated chemical exposure via a physiologically based pharmacokinetic submodel. The model probabilistically simulates microplastic concentrations in the gut, body tissue, and stool, the latter allowing validation against empirical data. Rescaling methods were used to ensure comparability between microplastic abundance data. Microplastic (1–5000 μm) median intake rates are 553 particles/capita/day (184 ng/capita/day) and 883 particles/capita/day (583 ng/capita/day) for children and adults, respectively. This intake can irreversibly accumulate to 8.32×10^3 (90% CI, 7.08×10^3 – 1.91×10^4) particles/capita or 6.4 (90% CI, 0.1 – 2.31×10^3) ng/capita for children until age 18, and up to 5.01×10^4 (90% CI, 5.25×10^3 – 9.33×10^4) particles/capita or 40.7 (90% CI, 0.8 – 9.85×10^3) ng/capita for adults until age 70 in the body tissue for 1–10 μm particles. Simulated microplastic concentrations in stool agree with empirical data. Chemical absorption from food and ingested microplastic of the nine intake media based on biphasic, reversible, and size-specific sorption kinetics, reveals that the contribution of microplastics to total chemical intake is small. The as-yet-unknown contributions of other food types are discussed in light of future research needs.

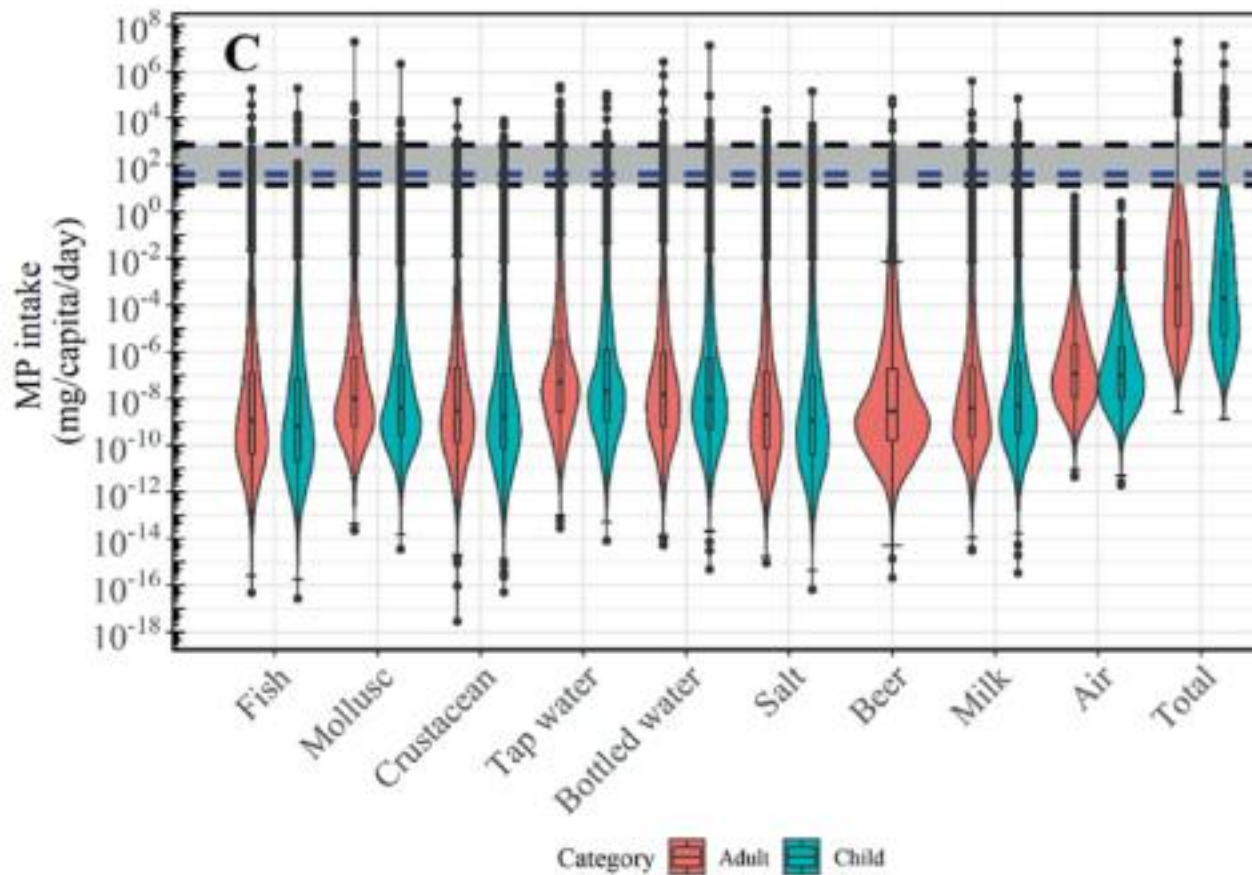


“

883 particles per person per day

583 ng/person/day

”





Bert Koelmans makes point that a week's ingestion is like a grain of salt between chopsticks – mere micrograms.



Ingested microplastics: Do humans eat one credit card per week?

Martin Pletz

Designing Plastics and Composite Materials, Department of Polymer Engineering and Science, Montanuniversität Leoben, Austria

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Microplastics
Size distribution
Ingestion
Human health

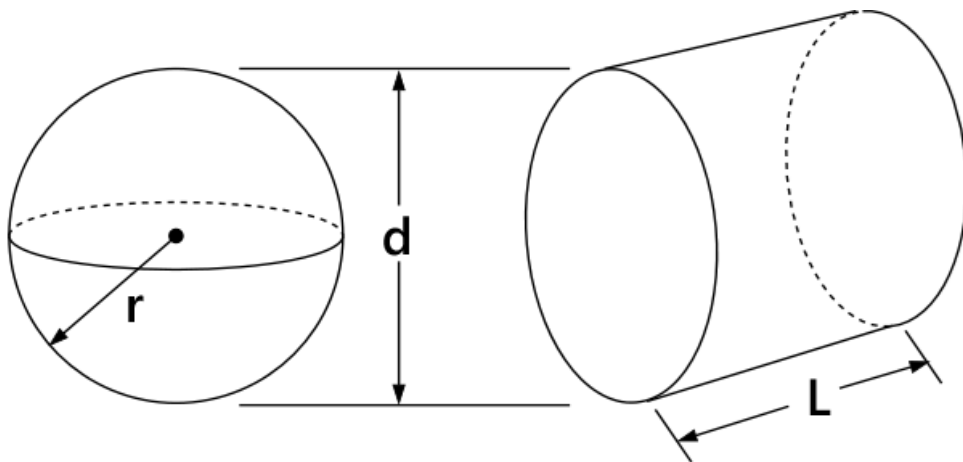
ABSTRACT

Ingested Microplastic (MP) particles can harm the human body. Estimations of the total mass of ingested MP particles correspond to 50 plastic bags per year (Bai et al., 2022), one credit card per week (Gruber et al., 2022), or a median value of 4.1 µg/week for adults (Mohamed Nor et al., 2021). The first two estimations are based on an analysis (Senathirajah et al., 2021) that predicts a total ingested mass of MP particles $m_{i,MP}$ of 0.1–5 g/week. This work revisits and evaluates this calculation and compares its results and methods to Mohamed Nor et al. (2021). Senathirajah combines data of averaged MP particle masses \bar{m}_{MP} from papers that reported MP particle sizes and MP particle counts n_{MP} in shellfish, salt, beer, and water based on other papers that detected MP particles. Combined with the estimated weekly consumption of those consumables, they compute $m_{i,MP}$. This work raises some serious issues of Senathirajah in the way they combine data and they obtained particle sizes. It concludes that Senathirajah overestimates $m_{i,MP}$ by several orders of magnitude and that $m_{i,MP}$ can be considered as a rather irrelevant factor for the toxic effects of MP particles on the human body.

a human eats
a credit card
worth of MPs not
every week but
every 23
thousand years.



GUESSING PARTICLE MASS



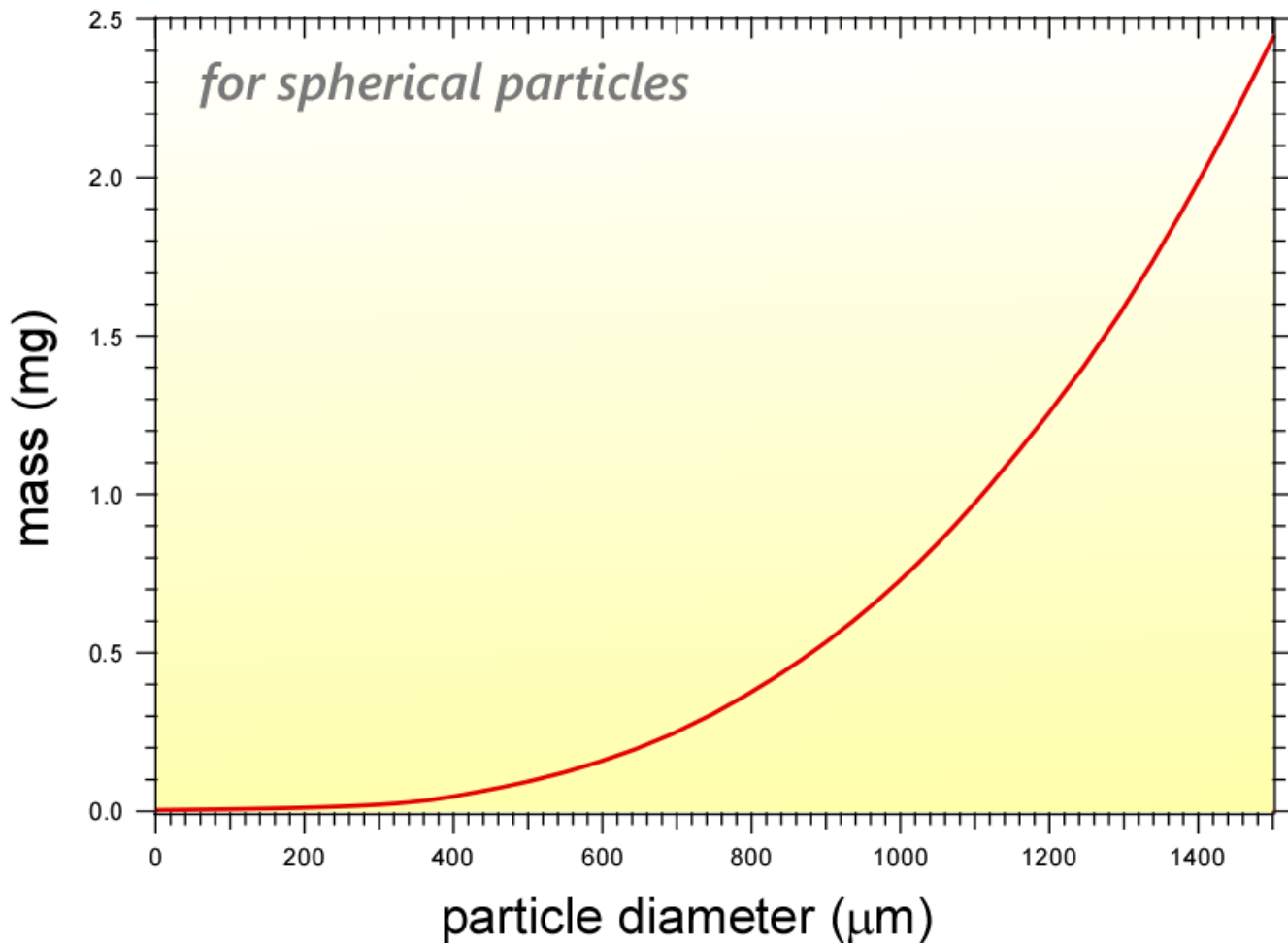
$$m = \rho V = \frac{\pi \rho d^3}{6}$$

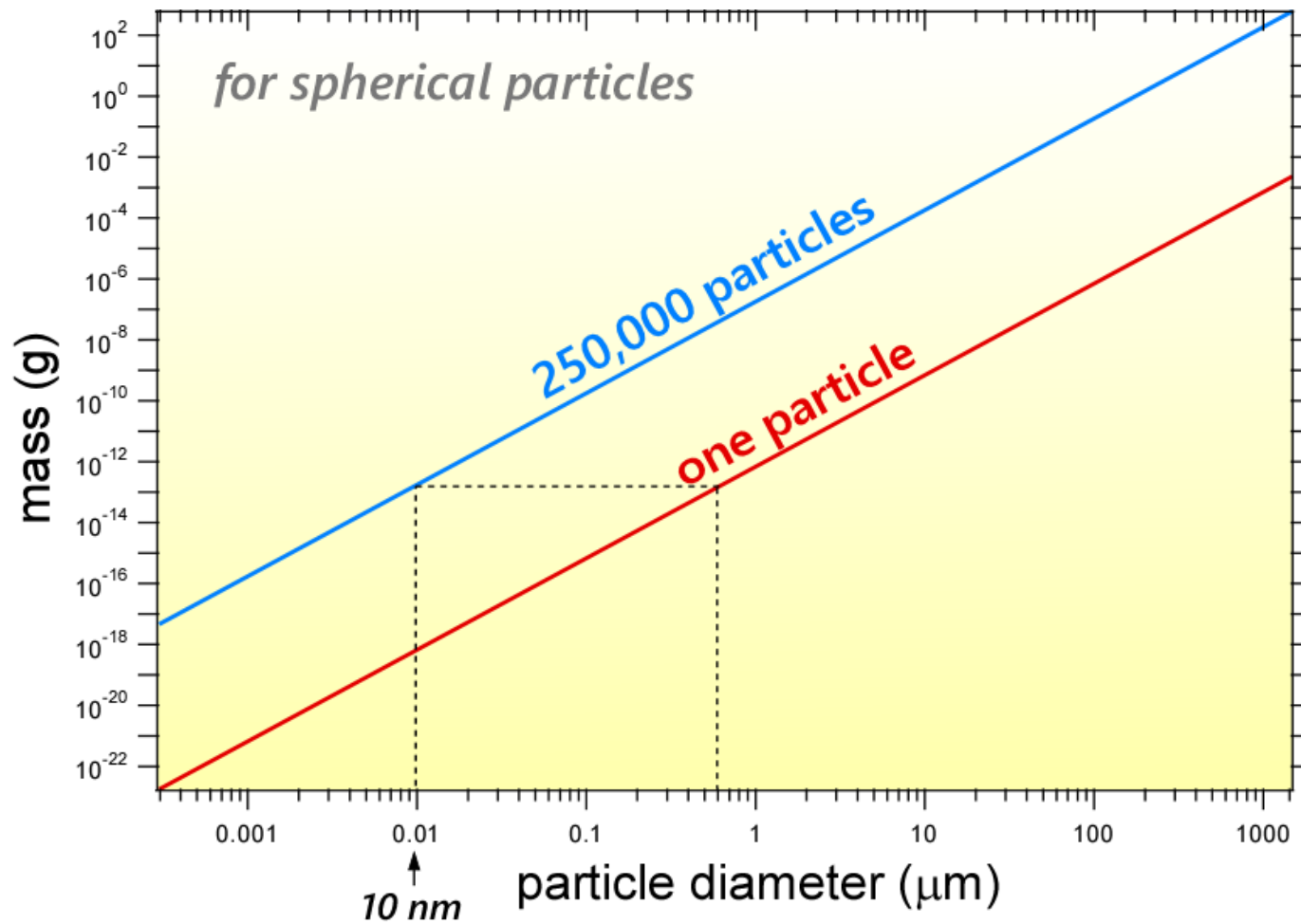
$$m = \frac{\pi \rho d^2 L}{4}$$

$$\text{let } A = \frac{L}{d}$$

$$m = \frac{\pi \rho d^3 A}{4}$$

polymer	density(g/cc)
PE	0.92-0.97
PP	0.88-0.91
PET	1.30-1.40







Widely reported facts about environmental plastic and plastic consumption are wrong.

Corrections of public perception and in the scientific literature are challenging.

Plastic particles are everywhere.





Picasso, 1955

PRESS ROOM

First-ever study finds cancer-causing chemicals in black plastic food-contact items sold in the U.S.

October 1, 2024



Highest levels of toxic flame retardants found in a spatula, sushi tray, and beaded necklace—likely the result of dirty plastic recycling

Toxic-Free Future urges the U.S. and states to ban poison plastics and harmful chemical additives through the Global Plastics Treaty and state policy

SEATTLE, WA — A new [peer-reviewed study](#) in *Chemosphere* finds, for the first-time, certain toxic chemicals in black plastic food-contact items sold in the United States. Led by scientists from Toxic-Free Future and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, [the testing uncovered](#) high levels of cancer-causing, hormone-disrupting flame retardant chemicals in a variety of household products made with black plastics including food serviceware, kitchen utensils, and toys.

Press Contact



Stephanie Stohler,
ssstohler@toxicfreefuture.org

To receive timely press releases and statements to your inbox, members of the media can request to be added to our press list.

“testing uncovered high levels of cancer-causing, hormone-disrupting flame retardants chemicals in a variety of household products made with black plastics..... Toxic flame retardant chemicals were found in 85% of analyzed products”



From e-waste to living space: Flame retardants contaminating household items add to concern about plastic recycling

Megan Liu ^a  , Sicco H. Brandsma ^b, Erika Schreder ^a

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemosphere.2024.143319> ↗

[Get rights and content](#) ↗

Refers to

[Response to the letter to the editor](#)

Chemosphere, Volume 385, September 2025, Pages 144547

Megan Liu, Sicco H. Brandsma, Erika Schreder

[Letter to the editor](#)

Chemosphere, Volume 385, September 2025, Pages 144542

Mark E. Jones

Referred to by

[Corrigendum to 'From e-waste to living space: Flame retardants contaminating household items add to concern about plastic recycling'...](#)

Chemosphere, Available online 3 July 2025, Pages 144552

Megan Liu, Sicco H. Brandsma, Erika Schreder

[Corrigendum to 'From e-waste to living space: Flame retardants contaminating household items add to concern about plastic recycling'...](#)

Chemosphere, Volume 370, February 2025, Pages 143903

Megan Liu, Sicco H. Brandsma, Erika Schreder

Harmful flame retardants (FRs) used in electronics were found in **black plastic household products**—including toys and kitchen utensils—likely due to recycled content.

Presumed FR Source



TBBPA, BDE-209, 2,4,6-TBP, DBDPE, TTBP-TAZ, BDP, RDP, & TPHP are or have been intentionally used in electronics.



FRs Detected



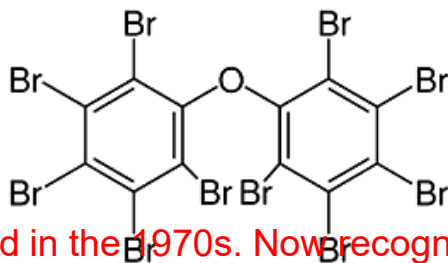
This study found Σ FR concentrations up to 22,790 mg/kg in food serviceware, hair accessories, kitchen utensils, and toys.

- 17 out of 20 products analyzed contained brominated and/or organophosphate FRs. **85%**
- Most frequently detected compounds included TBBPA, BDE-209, 2,4,6-TBP, RDP, BDP, and DBDPE.
- Items containing polymers used in electronics had significantly higher FR levels.



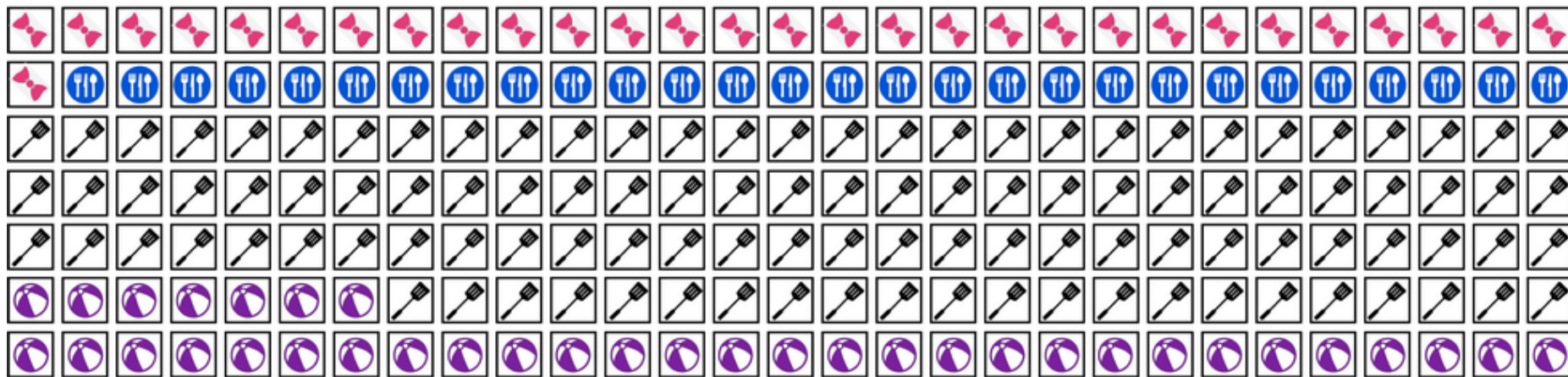
CALCULATION OF EXPOSURE TO BROMINATED FLAME RETARDANTS

- Measure concentration present in object
- Use correlation to estimate exposure
- Compare exposure to some “safe” level, such as EPA reference dose
- BDE-209, one of the earliest banned flame retardants, became a focus



BDE-209

BDE-209 – decabromoether - commercialised in the 1970s. Now recognised as a hazardous and persistent pollutant under 2017 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants meaning that treaty members must eliminate its production and use.



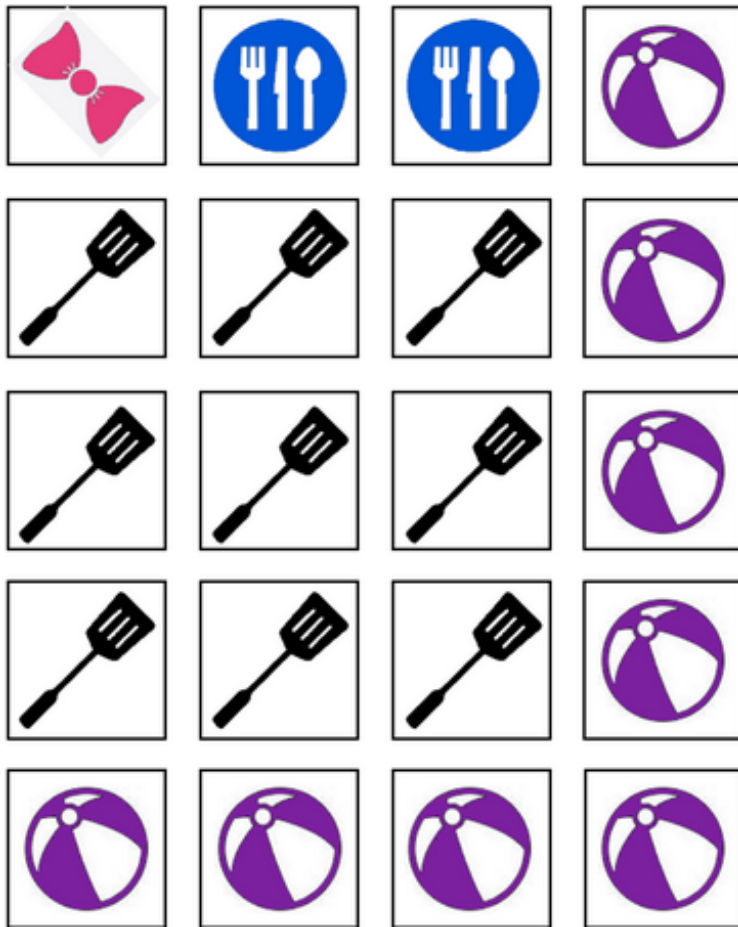
203 total items: 30 hair accessories, 28 food service, 36 toys, 109 kitchen items



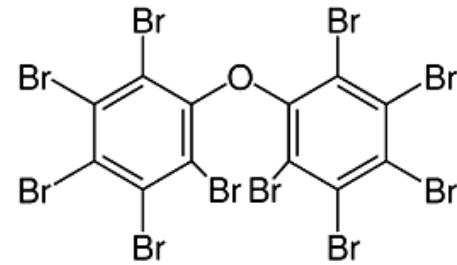
XRF analysis

retain only top 20 highest Br levels





Compound-sensitive LC-MS method used to analyze compositions and concentrations present in 20 of the 203 items in the collected cohort, only those with highest Br levels measured by XRF.



BDE-209

reported median value of
34.7 μ g/day for kitchen items

concluded too close to
42 μ g/day EPA reference dose

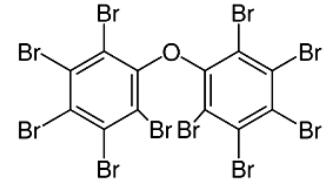
but they got it wrong - twice

CORRIGENDUM 1

- Miscalculated the reference dose by 10X
 - reported typical exposure as 42 $\mu\text{g}/\text{day}$ rather than the correct value, 420 $\mu\text{g}/\text{day}$
 - last line of the abstract is “estimation of exposure to BDE-209 from contaminated kitchen utensils indicated users would have a median intake of 34,700 ng/day, exceeding estimates for intake from dust and diet.” was never true; now even more not true
- Authors stand by the paper’s conclusions



showing BDE-209 in ug/day










BDE-209

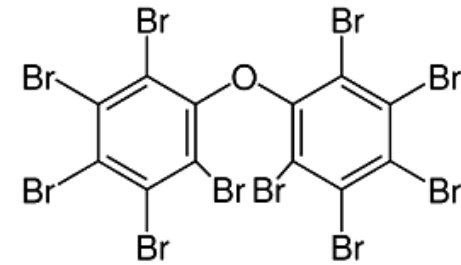
reported median value of
34.7 $\mu\text{g/day}$

actual median 4.1 $\mu\text{g/day}$

average is 16 $\mu\text{g/day}$ (24
ignoring BDL)

reference dose is 420 $\mu\text{g/day}$

 2.4	 BDL	 380	 BDL
 1.5	 BDL	 BDL	 BDL
 BDL	 6.3	 14	 1.6
 9.5	 4.1	 110	 1.6
 57	 40	 28	 35



BDE-209

34.7 μ g/day is actually the average of all 20 measured samples with BDLs entered as zero

showing BDE-209 in ug/day

It Gets Worse

concentration  exposure

correlation from Kuang et al.

$$f(C) = E$$

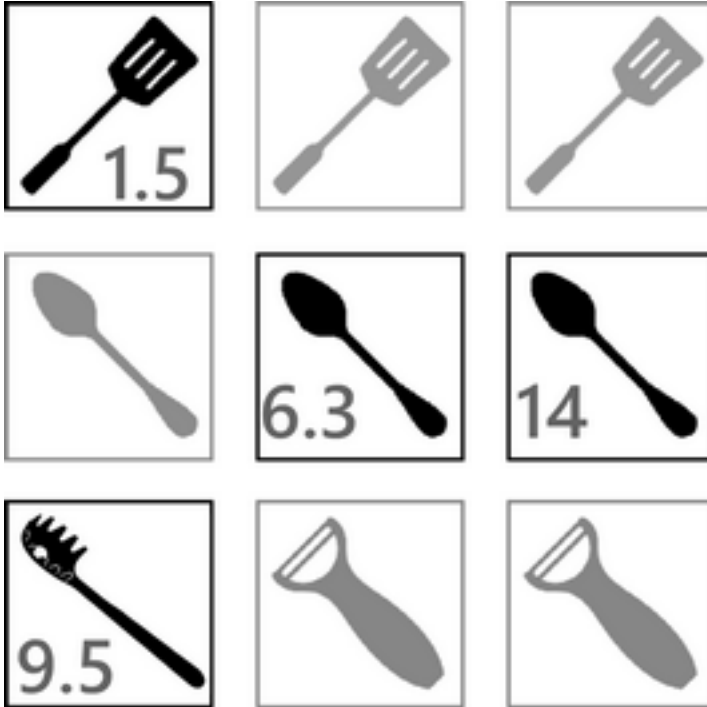
$$E \propto C$$

for immersion in hot oil for 15 minutes

conclude simple touching creates no exposure

Kuang J, Abdallah MA, Harrad S. Brominated flame retardants in black plastic kitchen utensils: Concentrations and human exposure implications. Science of The Total Environment. 2018 Jan 1;610:1138-46. doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2017.08.173.

author's treatment

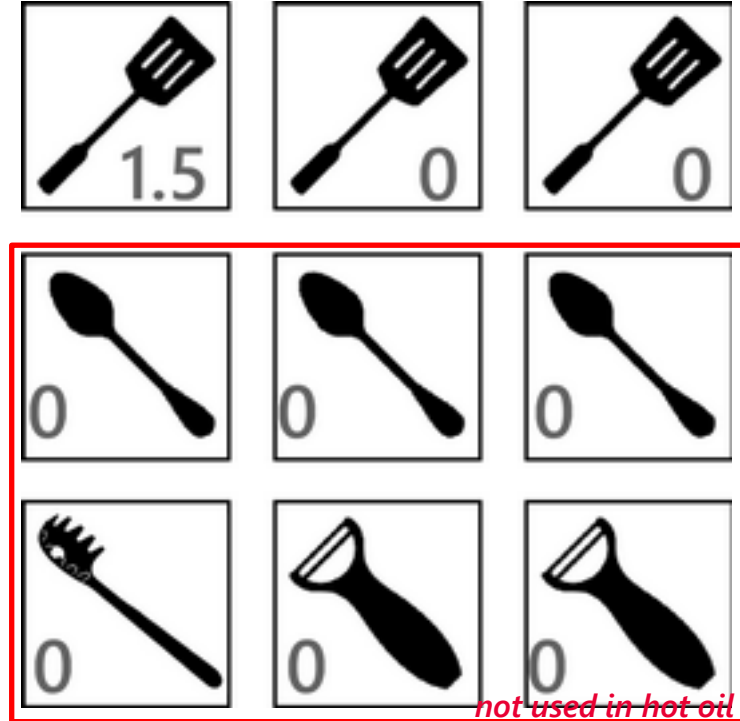


average = 7.9 $\mu\text{g/day}$ (was 34.7)
= 4.5 $\mu\text{g/day}$ ex. peelers

showing BDE-209 in ug/day

would be 4.5 excluding only peelers

more correct



0.17 $\mu\text{g/day}$ = 1.5/9

reference dose is 420 ug/day

even more correct



$$\begin{aligned}\text{average exposure} &= \frac{1.5 \text{ ug/day}}{109 \text{ samples}} \\ &= 14.5 \text{ ng/day}\end{aligned}$$

reference dose is 420,000 ng/day

It Gets Even Worse

In Corrigendum 2, state they only sampled handles.


The KitchenAid spatula shown in the paper has a nylon blade and ABS handle.

average exposure ~ 0





From e-waste to living space: Flame retardants contaminating household items add to concern about plastic recycling

Megan Liu ^a  , Sicco H. Brandsma ^b, Erika Schreder ^a

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemosphere.2024.143319> ↗

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Chemosphere, Volume 385, September 2025, Pages 144547

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Chemosphere, Volume 385, September 2025, Pages 144542

Mark E. Jones

Referred to by

[Corrigendum to 'From e-waste to living space: Flame retardants contaminating household items add to concern about plastic recycling'...](#)

Chemosphere, Available online 3 July 2025, Pages 144552

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[Corrigendum to 'From e-waste to living space: Flame retardants contaminating household items add to concern about plastic recycling'...](#)

Chemosphere, Volume 370, February 2025, Pages 143903

Megan Liu, Sicco H. Brandsma, Erika Schreder



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Papers with severe errors in method and math can get through peer review.

Retractions are hard to get even when math is in error. *No one is rewarded.*

Science appears to be failing at self-correction.



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