



[First Last name]  
Councilmember District [District No.]

## **REVISED AGENDA MATERIAL for Supplemental Packet 2**

**Meeting Date:** April 24, 2018

**Item Number:** 26

**Item Description:** Removing Plastic Microfibers From The Water Supply: A Referral to the Community Environmental Advisory Commission

**Submitted by:** Councilmember Harrison

Edited to reflect the intention of sending any relevant findings to EBMUD.

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Kate Harrison

Subject: Removing Plastic Microfibers From The Water Supply: A Referral to the Community Environmental Advisory Commission

### RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the Community Environmental Advisory Commission to assess the City's capacity to participate in an outreach program informing residents of the harmful nature of microfibers. [Ask CEAC to refer any of their findings to the East Bay Municipal Utility District and request a report on the organization's water sourcing methods in drought years.](#)

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable, due to its status as a Commission referral.

### BACKGROUND

The harmful nature of microfibers--tiny plastic bits often emerging from synthetic material--is the subject of a fledgling research movement. In recent years, concerned scientists have noted the prevalence of microfibers in a tap water supply and attempted to determine the impact of their presence. In the US, this issue is particularly urgent; according to a study conducted by Orb Media, 94% of their tap water samples contained plastic fibers. That rate ranked as the highest in the world.

Experts believe the toxic materials present in the microfibers could be of potential harm to human beings.

"We have enough data from looking at wildlife, and the impacts that it's having on wildlife, to be concerned," Dr. Sherri Mason, a microplastics expert at the State University of New York in Fredonia, told [The Guardian](#). "If it's impacting [wildlife], then how do we think that it's not going to somehow impact us?"

There are certain preventative measures individuals can take to limit their microfiber emissions. [Machine washing](#) synthetic clothing [in a machine](#) allows these fibers to escape from our washing machines and filter out into [sewage treatment plants like the ones maintained by EBMUD](#) ~~our water streams~~. One study indicates each wash of a synthetic jacket produces up to 2 grams of microfibers. By making a concerted effort to avoid washing one's own synthetic clothing as much as possible, individual steps can be taken to lessen the quantity of microfibers in a local context. [Other potential preventative measures include purchasing industry standard washing bags that filter out microfibers and investing in a top load washing machine.](#)

[Generally, Berkeley residents can be confident in their water quality. In non-drought years, the Sierras serve as the City's primary water source. Because the Sierras lie a distance from any wastewater sources, this water bears no risks of microfiber contamination. However, EBMUD's water sourcing methods in drought years remains](#)

unclear. There is a possibility that microfibers find their way into EBMUD's sewage treatment plants in these conditions, but it will require a dialogue with EBMUD to confirm one way or another.

~~Other potential preventative measures include purchasing industry standard washing bags that filter out microfibers and investing in a top load washing machine.~~

~~Unfortunately, the toothpaste is out of the tube, so to speak. With our water stream already treatment facilities irrevocably potentially contaminated, the City ought to look into measures to curb their impact.~~

~~From the perspective of this Councilmember, an informational campaign is the City's best mechanism for addressing this issue.~~

This item proposes the Community Environmental Advisory Commission compile a list of the most harmful microfiber-related behaviors, consider the most effective methods of distributing this information, and estimate any potential financial cost to the City. Once compiled, the item recommends the Commission send their findings to EBMUD and then request a report on the organization's water collection tactics during drought seasons.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

This item intends to improve the City's environmental practices.

#### CONTACT PERSON

Kate Harrison, District 4 Councilmember, 510-981-7140