



FACT SHEET: MICROPLASTICS

What are microplastics and microfibres?

Microplastics are plastic particles under 5mm. Some plastic is manufactured as microplastics and washed down drains. For example, microbeads which can be found in body cleansing products. There is also larger plastic debris which degrades into micro-sized particles over time with exposure to sun and water.

Microfibres are a type of microplastics that mostly come from clothing (polyester) and are generally between 0.1–0.8 mm in size.

Can microplastics be removed during the wastewater treatment process?

Wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove microplastics from wastewater and the retention of microplastics in wastewater treatment plants is being investigated. While results are limited, the more advanced treatment plants are likely to remove more microplastics and microfibres.

Research is also underway into the use of different technologies to remove microplastics from wastewater. However, these technologies are yet to be successfully implemented to remove all microplastics, including microfibres, from wastewater.

Are microplastics in drinking water?

Water utilities are not required to test for microplastics but it is possible that microplastics could be found in drinking water supplies depending on where water is sourced and how it is treated.

However, studies show that people are more likely to come in contact with microplastics through other means such as food wrapped in plastic or inhalation from clothing and textiles. Australia's drinking water quality remains among the best in the world and meets strict guidelines.

What are water utilities doing about microplastics?

Water utilities are supporting research that will help them better understand the ability of their treatment processes to capture microplastics and how they pass through the wastewater system.

This research will ensure the extent, nature and source of the issue is accurately understood before implementing any costly solutions that may not be effective.

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