

Plastics and microplastics and our waters - Get to know about unencapsulated dock foam

With cottaging season right around the corner, did you know that despite being a common and cheap product used for dock floatation, unencapsulated (or uncovered) polystyrene foam ("dock foam") deteriorates through exposure to water, sunlight and chemicals (e.g., gasoline and oil)?

In fact, dock foam is one of the top items found on shorelines and beaches around the world, with the product being found in wildlife and has been found to have negative effects on feeding and growth in lab settings, including the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin.

There is currently no federal law banning dock foam, although the Ontario legislature passed a bill to regulate this product.

In 2021, the Township of the Archipelago sponsored a successful resolution at the Cities Initiative annual meeting, calling on Canadian and U.S. federal governments, along with Quebec and the U.S. Great Lakes states to ban PS foam, among others. The Cities Initiative is working with partner organizations to raise the profile of the harms of dock foam with government and municipal stakeholders.

Municipalities, particularly those with many cottages and recreational shoreline properties, can also help address this issue by making sure their facilities don't use the product, educating their residents about the harms of dock foam, along with alternatives, and passing their own resolutions calling on governments to take action in regulating this product.