## Hawaii Passes Bill Banning Sunscreen That Can Harm Coral Reefs

Recent studies have led to a global push for more reef-safe sunscreens. Credit...Chip Litherland for The New York Times

By Elaine Glusac

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On May 1, Hawaii became the first state to pass a bill banning the sale of sunscreen containing chemicals believed to harm coral reefs.

The legislation prohibits the distribution of sunscreens containing the chemicals oxybenzone and octinoxate that scientists have found contributes to coral bleaching when washed off in the ocean. The Hawaii sunscreen bill now awaits the signature of the governor. The new rules will go into effect Jan. 1, 2021.

An estimated 14,000 tons of sunscreen is believed to be deposited in oceans annually with the greatest damage found in popular reef areas in Hawaii and the Caribbean. In 2015, the nonprofit Haereticus Environmental Laboratory surveyed Trunk Bay beach on St. John, where visitors ranged from 2,000 to 5,000 swimmers daily, and estimated over 6,000 pounds of sunscreen was deposited on the reef annually. The same year, it found an average of 412 pounds of sunscreen was deposited daily on the reef at Hanauma Bay, a popular snorkeling destination in Oahu that draws an average of 2,600 swimmers each day.

Sunscreen isn't the only enemy of healthy reefs; other polluters include ocean warming, agricultural runoff and sewage dumping. But banning harmful chemicals, say environmental advocates, is one variable swimmers can control.

"Hawaii's reefs have been slowly dying over the past 20 years, and that death spiral has been accelerating with the impact of an El Niño-induced mass bleaching events and increased local pollution impacts from both tourism and development," said Craig Downs, the executive director of the Haereticus Environmental Laboratory. "Everyone has come together to support this legislation, from local nurses and doctors, to resorts and airlines, as well as the entrepreneurial spirit of new sunscreen companies to supply reef-safer products."

Makers of traditional sunscreens opposed the legislation, pointing out that the chemicals in question are approved by the F.D.A. and vital to preventing skin cancer.

Reef-safe sunscreen include mineral sunblocks with zinc oxide and titanium dioxide. They must be "non-nano" in size to be considered reef-safe. If they are below 100 nanometers, the creams can be ingested by corals. Already, many island resorts and attractions, including Hanauma Bay State Park, are urging visitors to use reef-safe sunscreen.

Nittany Valley Organic's Sunscreen is Non-Nano & Reef Safe.

