

# Bill Looking To Ban Sunscreen Products Harmful To Human Health And Coral Reefs Overcomes First Hurdle

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A bill calling for a ban on the retail sale or offer for sale, and the distribution or importation for retail purposes of topical sunscreen products containing oxybenzone and octinoxate, was voted favorably out of the Committee on Government Operations, Consumers, and Veterans Affairs on Monday, and will be forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further vetting.

The measure, sponsored by Senators Janelle Sarauw and Marvin Blyden, was unanimously supported during the hearing. (See [Bill No. 33-0043](#)).

Detailed testimony was furnished during the hearing on the bill's impact to the environment and human health.

"Endocrine-disrupting chemical sunscreens, including oxybenzone, have been increasingly linked to early puberty in girls, Low sperm count and male infertility, and an increase in hormone-related cancers in both men and women," testified Harith Wickrema, nonprofit Island Green's president and known environmentalist.

"This bill... is a step in the right direction in terms of taking action to combat one of the many negative stressors affecting the health and vitality of our coral reefs and other coastal natural resources," said Howard Forbes Jr., coordinator for the Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service. "For the Virgin Islands territory, our coral reefs help to 1) support our tourism industry, 2) provide crucial shelter for marine animals such as fish, and in doing so, 3) help to maintain the diverse abundance of marine life present within our waters. Corals are animals that work hard every day, but like humans, they too can become sick if they are exposed to specific conditions that stress them out."

"We have a robust fishing community. Eighty percent of our corals have been lost, and the environment is of the utmost importance," Ms. Sarauw said. In a release issued Friday, the senator said, "We want to encourage a healthier and safer alternative in the use of natural sunscreen, but we also have to be aggressive in saving our reefs now by banning harmful sunscreen – that is our responsibility/ I will continue to champion and collaborate on measures that protect and/or reverse the harm done to our environment. A cleaner Virgin Islands, both in the health of its people and spaces, only serves to benefit us all."

The bill prohibits the sale of the products already in the territory after Sept. 30, 2020, or importation after Dec. 31, 2019, and bans use in the USVI after Jan. 1, 2021.

All members of the committee present — Senators Novelle Francis, Steven Payne, Sr., Athneil Thomas, Dwayne DeGraff and Oakland Benta — supported the bill.

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