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US Virgin Islands bans sunscreens harming coral reefs

Banned sunscreens include those containing 3 Os — oxybenzone, octocrylene and octinoxate — known to harm coral reefs

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The United States Virgin Islands (USVI) banned sunscreen products with chemicals known to be harmful to coral reefs and marine life.

The ban came into effect on March 30, 2020, making USVI territory the first in the United States to implement it.

Sunscreens containing the 3 Os — oxybenzone, octocrylene and octinoxate — harm the coral reefs that protect the Virgin Islands' shoreline. Sunscreens containing mineral alternatives such as zinc oxide and titanium dioxide have been exempted.

“The concentration of these chemicals is 40 times more than acceptable levels in some of our territorial waters. This simply cannot be,” said senator Janelle Sarauw, one of the sponsors of the bill, during a press release.

Other nations are likely to follow suit. The Hawaii government, for instance, stated that it has voted to ban the sale of sunscreens containing reef-damaging chemicals oxybenzone and octinoxate from 2021.

Key West in Florida has banned stores from keeping sunscreen containing the toxin 3 O's from 2021. The Caribbean islands of Bonaire have unanimously voted to ban the sale of sunscreen by 2021.

The archipelago nation of Palau is set to become the first country to enact a sunscreen ban, which will take effect in 2020.

Palau lawmakers said businesses could be fined up to \$1,000 for selling non-biodegradable sunscreens, according to media reports. Similarly, Mexico has requested public to not use sunscreen with harsh chemicals.

Guidelines (<https://www.tga.gov.au/book/export/html/5307>) was published by the Australian government on sunscreen and harsh chemicals use. It has not banned the sale, but has been regulating

sunscreens under four categories

“This ban will protect the environment, our health and our livelihood. But it is equally important to build awareness around the dangers of these chemicals and safer alternatives such as mineral sunscreens. Everyone must do their part,” said Sarauw.

To ensure sustainable tourism and implementation of the ban, authorities have come up with a protocol. All tourists would be notified about the ban via hotels, villas, and airlines.

“It is imperative that our coral and marine life are protected,” said Lisa Hamilton, president, US Virgin Islands Hotel & Tourism Association.

“We are working to ensure visitors have access to safe sunscreens and are informed of the dangers posed by the 3 Os,” she said.

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