

# Op Ec Sunscreen

Source staff April 22, 2021



After the sunscreen bill was passed by the Senate, Sen. Marvin Blyden, left, environmental advocate Harith Wickrema and Sen. Janelle Sarauw pose with sunscreen bill information. (Photo by Barry Leerdam for the V.I. Legislature)

The Earth Day theme this year is “Restore Our Earth.” There are many in the territory committed to this mission, doing amazing work every day.

Let us salute and celebrate the passionate efforts of those residents who help preserve our islands by keeping our beaches clean, recycling, composting, adopting solar power, preserving coral, hunting lion fish, launching a sustainable agriculture plan, investing in aquaponics, educating on sustainability and resilience, choosing electric vehicles, and advancing ecotourism. We also applaud the determination of those fighting for a container deposit to reduce litter, elimination of single use hotel amenities, banning of Styrofoam containers, fighting for pollution accountability at Limetree Bay, for clean air, clean water, toxic waste cleanup and rebuilding of Caneel Bay Resort, etc.

There are many areas where we still need to take urgent action. It is an SOS call. One of the easiest is education and enforcing the toxic sunscreen law. Although the law banning the importation, sale and use of sunscreens containing the “Toxic 3 Os” of Oxybenzone, Octinoxate and Octocrylene has been in effect for over a year, these products can still be



Despite promises to the contrary, the Department of Tourism hasn't included messaging about safe sunscreen in their marketing communications and it doesn't appear to be mentioned anywhere on their official tourism site. No steps have been taken to educate or encourage compliance.

Our governor, who is a strong advocate for preserving our marine life, himself has observed a brown sheen caused by toxic sunscreen when he has visited Magens Bay after cruise ship passengers departed. It has been observed at many other beaches as well including Trunk Bay.

However last summer/fall we observed clear azure blue emerald green waters at most beaches as hardly any tourists were swimming. Why? Because there was no toxic sunscreen entering the ocean.

Now even without cruise ships, our beaches have been full and at times overcrowded especially during Easter holidays. Many have been seen using toxic sunscreen and that brown sheen is back. **As a tourism based economy, once our marine life is depleted, beaches trashed and polluted with plastic including single use plastic bags, plastic straws, cigarette butts, toxic sunscreen, etc., we will no longer draw tourists.**

Let us not allow the ban on toxic sunscreen to go the way of plastic bags – with many retailers continuing to provide disposable plastic bags despite an official ban.

According to the FDA, the only sunscreens deemed GRASE (generally recognized as safe and effective) are mineral sunscreens, meaning those containing zinc oxide and titanium dioxide as the active ingredients. The "Toxic 3 Os" in chemical sunscreens don't simply stay on top of people's skin, they absorb into their bodies and have been discovered in breast milk, blood and urine and can disrupt hormones.

As seen in our waters, these chemicals also contaminate the sea and cause coral bleaching, 'zombie' coral which looks healthy but is unable to reproduce, and are dangerous to marine life. Coral reefs are considered to have the highest biodiversity of any of the planet's ecosystems and are vital to marine life and protecting coastlines. **If we don't enforce the ban, we risk losing the very beauty that attracts visitors to our shores.**

We call on our government agencies to educate and enforce these laws. We urge you to write to the governor, senators and the delegate.

Former President Bill Clinton publicly gave his support for the ban and offered CGI's assistance with reaching leadership of airlines and cruise lines on this important environmental campaign. But it needs to be officially requested.

beaches, restaurants, boating/watersports vendors and other public areas.

A “sunscreen swap” booth would allow visitors to turn in banned product for safe mineral sunscreen. Sunscreen PSAs could be played on flights and information provided in-room at hotels and rental properties. These are just the basics, Island Green & CORE developed and published a full plan. Visit [www.islandgreenliving.org](http://www.islandgreenliving.org) for details.

In addition to calling on official agencies to do their part, the public must take responsibility too. This means reading ingredient labels and ensuring you are using only safe sunscreen. Become a “Green Ambassador” and speak up when you see a local retailer selling toxic products. Take a photo of the toxic sunscreen on the store shelf and post it on social media, call out the offenders. Feel free to send it to Island Green and we will inform DLCA. Let’s support short staffed DLCA to help preserve our islands.

Tourism, let’s issue a code of conduct /reminders to tourists along with the sampling of rum, offer the guidelines.

On a positive note, during a recent meeting with Delegate Stacey Plaskett, we spoke about the possibility of national legislation on toxic sunscreen and she was open to exploring the idea. Thank you, Delegate.

We the community can make a difference. Today provides an opportunity to reflect on our important role in furthering green initiatives – reaffirming the tenets of Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

Let’s get this right so next Earth Day, we can restore our faith in officials for educating and enforcing laws that will get closer to “Restoring our Earth.”

*Harith Wickrema is president of the board of Island Green Living Association.*



*Harith Wickrema is president of Island Green Living. (Submitted photo)*

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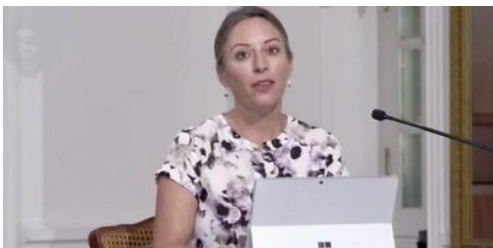


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While remaining cautiously optimistic about a 1.4 percent weekly positivity rate, officials cautioned on Monday that

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