

Restore Texas Waters To Be Free of Plastic Pollution



SIERRA CLUB
LONE STAR CHAPTER

State Must Regulate Nurdles That Wreak Havoc on Coastal Ecosystems

Contact: Alex Ortiz, Water Resources Specialist, alex.ortiz@sierraclub.org, 512-923-4487

The Problem

- Texas waters are polluted with pre-production plastics, which include “nurdles.” The Clean Water Act grants the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) authority to regulate pre-production plastic pollution. In 2022, TCEQ proposed a change to its Surface Water Quality Standards to prohibit discharge of these pollutants, but withdrew the proposal due to unjustified concern about its authority.
- The Sunset Advisory Commission has criticized TCEQ for being a “reluctant regulator” that lacks public trust.
- Nurdles are toxic and also attract other harmful pollutants that can stick to and build up on their surface and then leach into the environment.
- **Risks include degraded water quality, threatened native wildlife that eat the nurdles, and contaminated soil, as well as potential human health harms to the digestive, endocrine, and nervous systems.**

Potential Solutions

- The Legislature should explicitly instruct TCEQ to consider the effect of primary plastic pollution on the ecosystem through the Surface Water Quality Standards.
- The Legislature should direct TCEQ to establish rules for zero-discharge of pre-production plastic as well as provide cleanup and remediation mechanisms.

Constituent Support

- More than 500 Sierra Club members submitted comments to the TCEQ last year, urging them to ban pre-production plastic pollution.
- Rural Texans have sued industry for over-polluting the state’s waters with nurdles.
- Constituent momentum against nurdle pollution is growing. Citizen scientists on Mustang and North Padre islands founded a local Nurdle Patrol group in 2018 to track nurdles and educate the public about their hazards. Other Texans have gone on a “Great Gulf Nurdle Expedition” and filmed a documentary about their findings.