

## Sunscreen Takes a Toll on Our Ocean Life

Even though reefs only seem like rock, they are alive and have a large part in our ocean life. The limestone skeletons of living coral and the hard skeletal remains of dead coral provide structure for a reef. These elements also offer habitat and food to the many fish and invertebrates that live around it. Algae also have a big role in the ocean by providing life-sustaining oxygen for all marine life. The oceans' algae provide more oxygen than all land plants in the world combined. Reefs also protect shorelines from erosion and storm damage by limiting the impact of strong waves. Reefs also provide diverse recreational opportunities, like snorkeling and diving; making Hawaii a top tourist destination and generating \$800 million a year for Hawaii's marine tourism industry. Despite the coral reef's importance, it suffers from degradation that began about 100 years ago as Westerners began to arrive. However, since the Hawaiian islands are large tourist attractions, recreation can increase the reefs' struggle to survive. People need to be more alert in the issue of using regular sunscreen because the risk of our ocean life vanishing increases more each day. A safer alternative for both humans and our ocean life are different methods of natural sunscreen.

Parents have always warned children of the importance of wearing sunscreen when going out in the sun. Yes, commercial sunscreen does help avoid sunburn, but what people do not see is that many ingredients in commercial sunscreens encourage cancer growth. One of the ingredients that make commercial sunscreens a detriment to the coral reefs is Oxybenzone, which is the main reason for coral bleaching. Since the sun is our best source of vitamin D, blocking out too much can affect the health of a person. Taking in the benefits of sunlight can do much good for the body and there are many natural alternatives that can benefit our skin and ocean life. Oils such as

red raspberry seed oil and coconut oil are great alternatives to commercial sunscreens. Red raspberry seed oil is one of the best seed-oil sunscreens because it averages 28-50 SPF while also blocking the effects of UVB rays. Coconut oil blocks about 20% of the sun's rays and also moisturizes the skin and smoothes out blemishes. It fights inflammation from the inside of your body and contributes to the healthy production of vitamin D. Another advantage of investing in natural sunscreen is that most alternatives are almost half the price of commercial sunscreens. Popular retail stores sell commercial sunscreens at high prices of \$31.00 to \$36.00. While natural sunscreens, such as coconut oil and wheat germ oil, can range from \$11.99 to \$16.31. Choosing to use natural alternatives can also be free if you have access to an Aloe plant. Applying Aloe before being exposed to the sun can block out 20% of sunlight, just like coconut oil.

Clarence T. C. Ching made a legacy for himself and did everything in his power to carry on his lifelong passion for helping people. We, too, can create a legacy of our own community by taking proper care of the islands and the ocean. The smallest impact of human activity can be the cause of downfall in our marine life and we, just like the animals, need the ocean to be clean, protected and respected. I believe that his main vision was to protect the islands and benefit the future generation. Like Clarence T.C. Ching, we want this same focus for our own community and ocean life. Taking care of our bodies is just as important as taking care of the islands and the smallest acts can make the biggest differences.

Wearing commercial sunscreens can have a big impact on our environment since we count on ocean life as a part of our daily lives. As we enter the water after applying commercial sunscreens, it can wash off and cause damage to the ocean. Sources state that there are currently 6,000 to 14,000 tons of sunscreen being washed off onto coral reefs each year. If we do not do

something about this issue now, about 700,000 tons of sunscreen will damage our coral reefs in 50 years. Future generations may not have the same opportunity we have to enjoy the beauty of our oceans if we do not spread more awareness about the harmful use of commercial sunscreens. If the damage to coral reefs continue to increase, the reef will die and be incapable of sustaining the ocean's environment. When our ocean life goes completely extinct, our islands' future will begin to look in misfortunate and we will regret not taking proper care of the ocean sooner.

The ocean is not just for surfers and scuba divers to enjoy, but it is also very important to everything that relies on it for medicines, tourism and economic benefits. Of all the many things that cause harm towards ocean life, commercial sunscreens are big factors of why our coral reefs are in danger of going extinct. It is never too late to switch to natural sunscreens and continue educating ourselves on issues such as this. We are why our ocean life is possibly going extinct and as both the protectors and users of the land and water, we need to make up for the damage we've caused. The smallest actions and investments can make a large impact on our marine life and benefit the lives of future generations.

## Works Cited

Alexander, Beth. "How Is Sunscreen Actually Affecting the Marine Environment?" *Sea Going Green*, Sea Going Green, 12 Feb. 2018, [www.seagoinggreen.org/blog/2018/2/12/how-is-sunscreen-actually-affecting-the-marine-environment](http://www.seagoinggreen.org/blog/2018/2/12/how-is-sunscreen-actually-affecting-the-marine-environment).

"The Hawaiian Coral Reef." *To*, [www.to-hawaii.com/troubles/hawaiian-coral-reef.php](http://www.to-hawaii.com/troubles/hawaiian-coral-reef.php).

TodayShow. "These Are the Best Sunscreens to Buy Now, According to Consumer Reports." *TODAY.com*, 8 May 2019, [www.today.com/health/consumer-reports-reveals-best-sunscreens-buy-2017-t111677](http://www.today.com/health/consumer-reports-reveals-best-sunscreens-buy-2017-t111677).

"11 Natural Sunscreen Alternatives." *Sunwarrior*, [sunwarrior.com/blogs/health-hub/natural-sunscreen-alternatives](http://sunwarrior.com/blogs/health-hub/natural-sunscreen-alternatives).