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Global Cosmetics and Personal Care Industry Addresses Plastic Pollution in Oceans

“The global cosmetics and personal care products industry has a strong and longstanding commitment to protecting the environment and we actively support the ongoing, concerted efforts by industry, governments, multinational entities and NGOs to identify and target sources of plastic ocean debris.

“We believe that efforts towards protecting the environment matter. Our industry led the way by taking action to phase out plastic microbeads from cleansing and exfoliating wash-off products despite scientific research having shown that these ingredients in our products are not a significant contributor to marine pollution.

“We are disappointed that the U.N. Environment Programme’s (UNEP) Clean Seas campaign inaccurately overstates the contribution of cosmetics and personal care products to microplastic marine litter. Further, we are disappointed that the UNEP initiative does not recognize the significant efforts already taken by our industry.

“A number of studies by independent researchers from around the world have pointed to the leading sources of plastic pollution at both the “macro” and “micro” levels – discarded bags and other plastic packaging, particles from vehicle tires washed off roads, and synthetic fibers from textiles, among other sources. These studies, including UNEP’s research, have concluded that ingredients in cosmetics and personal care products, such as plastic microbeads, make up only the tiniest fraction of plastic pollution in aquatic environments. For example, UNEP’s 2016 report, Marine Plastics Debris and Microplastics, concluded that, ‘Although the use of microplastics in [personal care products] may appear to represent a significant source, it is relatively small compared with other sources...’

“In addition, recent studies have found that wastewater treatment facilities remove up to 99 percent of all solid plastic particles, whatever their source¹.

“We sincerely hope the Clean Seas initiative will follow the science to the true sources and impacts of plastic debris, and find real solutions that will benefit our environment and all those who depend on it. We look forward to serving as a resource for UNEP’s continued work.”

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