

## Plastic cotton buds

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### This guidance is for Scotland

The Environmental Protection (Cotton Buds) (Scotland) Regulations 2019 prohibit the manufacture, supply, intention to supply or possession to supply any plastic cotton bud in Scotland.

### Damage caused

The Regulations have been introduced to reduce plastic pollution in the oceans. Plastic-stemmed cotton buds are contributing to pollution in the ocean, damaging the marine environment and are one of the most commonly found items of plastic litter washed up on the shore.

Plastic cotton bud stems are consistently observed to constitute approximately 5-10% of marine debris surveyed in European seas and feature in the 10 most commonly found items in Marine Conservation Society beach surveys in Scotland. Fish and other marine animals can eat them (because of their size), introducing potentially toxic substances into the food chain. They also increase the risk to public health from contact on beaches and bathing waters.

Campaigns to promote behaviour change have failed to stop the irresponsible disposal of these items down toilets. They are in our seas because people are continuing to flush them down toilets and sewage treatment works cannot prevent all of them reaching the sea. When entering sewage systems the plastic stems do not settle with organics; their buoyancy allows them to flow through plant equipment and their narrow diameter means they are not caught by all screens.

The Cotton Bud Project has demonstrated that manufacturers and retailers are able to trade in viable biodegradable alternative products and therefore there is no known reason why other companies would be unable to follow this best practice.

### Products covered by the ban

The ban only applies to plastic cotton buds.

The Regulations define 'plastic' as "a synthetic polymeric substance that can be moulded, extruded or

physically manipulated into various solid forms and that retains its final manufactured shape during use in its intended applications".

A 'plastic-stemmed cotton bud' is defined as "a rod of plastic which has cotton wrapped around both ends".

## Penalties

Failure to comply with trading standards law can lead to enforcement action and to sanctions, which may include a fine and/or imprisonment. For more information please see 'Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

## Key legislation

Environmental Protection (Cotton Buds) (Scotland) Regulations 2019

Last reviewed / updated: October 2020

## In this update

No major changes

## Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on amendments to legislation can be found on each link's 'More Resources' tab.

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