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Global Scientific Study Finds Microscopic Plastic Fibers Contaminating Tap Water

More than 80 percent of tap water samples collected worldwide tested positive for microplastics

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, Orb Media, a D.C.-based non-profit digital newsroom, released *Invisibles: The Plastic Inside Us*, the first ever global scientific study on the overwhelming prevalence of microplastics—extremely small pieces (less than 5 mm) of plastic debris resulting from the disposal and breakdown of consumer products and industrial waste—in tap water.

“Our exclusive research found 83 percent of the tap water samples from 14 countries are contaminated with microscopic plastic fibers,” said Molly Bingham, founder and CEO, Orb Media. “Scientists say they don’t really know how these microplastics reach our taps or what the health risks might be. But microplastics have been shown to absorb toxic chemicals from the marine environment, and then release them when consumed by fish and mammals. I am concerned by the implications of our research. At the very least, I hope that our work triggers large scale, global research on plastic contamination and the ramifications for human health - particularly that of children.”

The tap water study, conceived and coordinated by Orb, was designed by Dr. Sherri Mason of the State University of New York at Fredonia, and Elizabeth Wattenberg at the University of Minnesota, School of Public Health. They oversaw the sample testing, which was carried out by researcher, Mary Kosuth. MSc. Kosuth screened 159 half liter drinking water samples from 14 countries: Cuba, Ecuador, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Slovakia, Switzerland, Uganda the U.K., and the U.S.

Orb journalists Chris Tyree and Dan Morrison reported from Hong Kong, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, India, Uganda, the U.K., and the U.S. The journalists explored how plastic has infiltrated communities around the globe and how those communities are responding to the threat of plastic waste; they also coordinated the sampling and testing of tap water from more than a dozen cities on five continents.

“Since the problem of plastic was created exclusively by human beings through our indifference, it can be solved by human beings by paying attention to it,” said Muhammad Yunus, 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. “Now what we need is a determination to get it done before it gets us.”

The contamination of these global tap water samples distributes evenly across the globe. Drinking water from the Trump Grille in New York, the Sloane Club in London and the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C., all contained microplastics. As did samples from a private apartment in Beirut, a household tap in Slovakia and a public spigot on the shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda.

Orb will continue to test additional tap water samples from around the world for microscopic plastic fibers and will announce these results in late September of 2017. The story is here: https://orbmedia.org/stories/Invisibles_plastics



Microscopic Plastic Fiber in Tap Water from U.S. Capitol Visitor Center
Copyright Chris Tyree. Photo taken while reporting for Orb, May 2017.

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Orb is a global nonprofit digital newsroom based in Washington, D.C. that produces journalism that unites us as a global community around our human story.

- Orb produces transmedia projects categorized by 8 core issues — food, water, energy, health, education, environment, trade, and governance — that affect us all, & the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Each transmedia project integrates original data analysis, social journalism, field reporting, and is produced in multiple formats and the world's most widely spoken languages.

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