

Ecology Fights Back

By Reg P. Wydeven
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When I was six or seven, my buddy, Brad, got HBO. The first movie I ever remember watching at his house was 'The Food of the Gods.' Based on an H.G. Wells story, the flick focuses on Morgan, a professional football player who takes his friends on a hunting trip on an island in British Columbia.

While hunting, one of the men is stung to death by gigantic wasps. It turns out the wasps ate a mysterious substance that bubbles up from the ground. Considering it a gift from God, a local farmer feeds the stuff to his chickens that grow to be eight feet tall. In addition to growing, animals that consume the substance become extremely aggressive.

The climax of the movie shows the protagonists fighting off giant rats from the roof of the farmer's house. Morgan blows up a nearby dam to flood the area and drown the rats, whose increased mass prevents them from swimming.

At the end of the movie, jars of the substance stored in the farmer's house wash away and break, emptying into a stream that cows are seen drinking from. As the credits roll, school kids are drinking the tainted milk and will presumably grow into monsters.

Even as a youngster, I understood the movie's message about the impact of pollution on our ecosystem. I also stopped drinking milk for several weeks.

I wonder if Eric T. Schneiderman, New York's attorney general, ever saw 'The Food of the Gods.'

Schneiderman recently asked the New York legislature to ban microbeads, which are tiny particles of plastic used in many beauty and skin care products, such as scrubs, soap, shampoo and toothpaste. They are used as an abrasive or exfoliate in place of natural ingredients.

Environmentalists claim they are a dangerous pollutant. Since they're plastic, microbeads aren't biodegradable. They have been found in high levels in numerous waterways and are believed to accumulate toxic chemicals, like those found in pesticides.

A statement released by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand claims that, "When plastic microbeads leach into our water, they attract toxins that harm fish and birds and get passed on to humans." I assume, however, that consumers of the toxic microbeads will get sick or die, as opposed to growing to gigantic proportions and menacing humanity. Gillibrand is also seeking a federal ban on microbeads.

New York is the latest of several states to target microbeads. Last year, Illinois became the first state to outlaw them, followed by New Jersey. Wisconsin, which currently has two plans on the table, is among several states considering bans.

Corporate America is also getting on board. Companies such as Colgate-Palmolive, Johnson & Johnson, L'Oreal, Procter & Gamble and Unilever all intend to phase out microbeads. If you're curious whether the products you use contain microbeads, look for polyethylene or polypropylene in the ingredients.

If microbeads do result in us being overrun by giant rats, at least they'll have smooth skin.

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