



Key West City Commission Bans Certain Sunscreens to Protect Coral (Video)

KEY WEST, Fla. — The Key West City Commission passed a ban late Tuesday night on sunscreen containing two chemicals experts believe harm coral reefs.

The commission voted 6-1 to pass an ordinance banning the sale or distribution of any sunscreen product that contains oxybenzone and/or octinoxate, which are believed to negatively affect coral reefs and marine life.

Key West and the Florida Keys island chain are paralleled by the continental United States' only living coral barrier reef, lying within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Various studies indicate that oxybenzone and octinoxate can increase coral bleaching, cause mortality in developing coral, and cause genetic damage to corals and other marine organisms.

“To me it boils right down to the fact that there are thousands of sunscreens out there and we have one reef, and we have an opportunity to do one small thing to protect that,” said Key West Mayor Teri Johnston. I believe it’s our obligation.”

The ordinance is to go into effect Jan. 1, 2021, and be enforced through warnings and civil citations. Exceptions are to be made for medically licensed prescriptions.

The commission listened to about 35 speakers on the topic, with an overwhelming majority in favor of the ban. A standing ovation followed the vote adopting it.

“Hopefully other communities in the state of Florida will pick up on this as well and start their process,” said Commissioner Jimmy Weekley.

The commission also passed a resolution directing Key West’s sustainability board to research the impact of sunscreens on reefs, the effectiveness of sunscreens that do not contain the two chemicals and other factors that may negatively impact reefs including global warming.