



# CTA-188-Prescriptions for Sun Screens

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The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation  
Vic Ferguson

512.986.1902  
Executive Director/Founder

4010 Skipper Rd  
vferguson@wfcrc.org

Sebring, Florida 33870  
vferguson001@gmail.com

Reprinted 8/18/19



## Proposed Florida bill could require prescription for sunscreens in effort to save coral reefs!

by [Mariecor Agravante](#)



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In a bid to protect the Sunshine State's reefs from [coral bleaching](#), a new legislative bill has been proposed that requires a physician's prescription for sunscreens containing oxybenzone and octinoxate, on grounds that these chemicals are harmful to marine coastal environments. The two ingredients are found in roughly 80 percent of all commercially available sunscreens. Discouraging their widespread use can help protect Florida's fragile coral ecosystems.

Following in the footsteps of [Hawaii](#) and [Key West](#), all over-the-counter sunscreens will need to be free of both oxybenzone and octinoxate to be deemed safe enough for use, because both chemicals contribute to coral reef bleaching and the compromised health of reef aquatic life. If approved, the bill will take effect in 2020.

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Coral reefs are a valuable asset to the Sunshine State. They are beneficial for environmental and economic reasons, such as protecting coastal communities from wave action and storm surges, providing [ecosystem](#) biodiversity, serving as a food resource and offering commercial tourism opportunities.

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What's more, Florida is "the only state in the continental United States to have extensive coral reef formations near its coasts. These reefs extend over 300 miles," according to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#). Coral reef activities promote tourism and businesses that "generate \$3.4 billion and support 36,000 jobs in the region each year."

Reputed to be the third-longest coral barrier reef in the world, Florida's celebrated reefs, sadly, have not been faring well in recent years due to a combination of factors: warming ocean temperatures, acidification, rising sea levels, erosion, pollution, coastal development, offshore oil and gas drilling, dredging, boat groundings, propeller and anchor damage, unsustainable fishing activities, invasive species and infection and disease. Because the [coral reefs](#) are left at a delicate tipping point, a patchwork of restoration efforts, largely from [marine conservation](#) groups, have attempted to revitalize them. It is hoped this bill can help save the fragile ecosystem.

Oxybenzone and octinoxate are harmful to corals. As documented by a NOAA study published in the journal [Environmental Contamination and Toxicology](#), they damage coral DNA, beget aberrant growth and defective development in young coral, exacerbate coral bleaching vulnerabilities and ultimately prevent the coral from reproducing properly. Because both oxybenzone and octinoxate accumulate in coral tissue, the coral become highly susceptible to infection and disease, likewise culminating in reef degradation.

Critics complain the new legislation will increase skin cancer risks; however, the bill's proponents argue for a shift toward "reef-friendly" alternative sunscreens. The [National Park Service](#), for instance, recommends "titanium oxide or zinc oxide, which are natural mineral ingredients." Neither titanium oxide nor zinc oxide have been found to be harmful to coral reefs, making both appealing as [eco-friendly](#) substitutes.

Via [CNN](#)

*Image via Shutterstock*

**Vic Ferguson**

[The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation](#)

[Executive Director/Founder](#)

[Relief without Borders](#)

[March for the Ocean](#)

642 So. Commerce Ave

Sebring, Florida 33870

[vferguson@wfcrc.org](mailto:vferguson@wfcrc.org) (best method of contact)

512.986.1902

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