

Editorial: Ecological headaches for the nonwovens and synthetic fibre industries

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Abstracts

2018 has been a challenging year for makers of products based on synthetic fibres as a mountain of negative publicity has been generated by the issues of microplastics in the oceans, fatbergs and plastic waste. As a result, manufacturers of products based on synthetic fibres are under pressure to significantly improve the environmental sustainability of their output. Producers of disposable wipes—which have been found to account for 93% of the materials involved in fatbergs—are working to develop flushable versions. Producers of single-use plastic packaging, meanwhile, are being encouraged to develop products which are reusable, recyclable or compostable. Pressure to improve environmental sustainability presents significant opportunities for innovation, and it is expected that new processes and new fibres such as polyhydroxyalkanoate (PHA), polyhydroxybutyrate (PHB) and polybutylene succinate (PBS) will gain prominence within the wipes industry. Another fibre which is expected to gain prominence is that of polylactic acid (PLA)—which can be used in the manufacture of wipes and is being used increasingly in the manufacture of teabags. In this report, Robin Anson highlights some of the key challenges faced by producers of synthetic fibres, nonwovens and other technical textile products with particular reference to the issue of identifying suitable alternatives to synthetic fibres. Topics discussed include: microplastics in the oceans; plastic waste and single-use plastics; fatbergs; and growth in the flushable wipes market.



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