



Nanotech, “Toxic Socks” Raise Concerns

Nanotechnology is now at a store near you. Valued for its germ and odor-fighting ability, nanoparticles are in products from socks to bandages to washing machines. But as it gets more popular, scientists suggest a closer look at its environmental effects.



Nanotechnology is used in many forms of sportswear

Recent research says that normal washing can rinse some of the silver bits from socks treated with it. They suggest that these bits could travel in wastewater, entering natural waterways where they might have unwanted effects on organisms living there. “This is the first report of anyone looking at the release of

silver from (clothing) ...” said a scientist.

Researchers bought six pairs of name brand anti-odor socks treated with nanosilver. They soaked them in a jar of water, shook the contents for an hour and tested the water for silver. “From what we saw, different socks released silver at different rates,” said a scientist. “Some of the sock materials released all of the silver in the first few washings ... Some didn’t release any.”

Silver does not just attack odor-causing germs. It can change processes essential for life in other aquatic animals. “Once the silver ions get into the gills of fish, it’s a pretty efficient killer,” said one scientist.

Silver has been used since ancient times, but the nanoparticle form has only recently been used in clothing. Beyond socks, nanosilver is used in bandages, and sports wear. “People don’t know what nanotechnology is but they are out there buying things with (these) in them. Our work suggests that we need to start thinking about these things,” said a scientist.

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