

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Letter From The Editor: Celebrating Ten Years

This issue of *The Next STEP* marks the tenth anniversary of this newsletter's launch in 2001. As I reflect on our shared journey so far, I feel a wonderful sense of accomplishment and gratitude, both for the vision of this innovative project and for its support from the Sebastopol community and the City of Sebastopol.

My personal passion for producing this newsletter has come first from a fierce desire to protect our health from the invisible everyday toxics that injure our well-being without our permission. I'm also committed to stopping toxics' harm to nature's wild creatures and the precious ecosystems that underlie our survival in so many ways. Too often in this culture we forget the basic truth that every aspect of our lives depends on clean and healthy air, water, food, and more. Regardless of our political orientation, we all want a safe world for ourselves and our children.

So, as TNS marks this milestone, I invite you to fill out the enclosed survey card, to let us know what information in this newsletter has been of value to you, and how we might serve you in the future. I look forward to hearing your thoughts!



Health Impacts: What MCS Can Show Us All

In previous issues of *The Next STEP*, we've reported on the demonstrated links between toxics and various illnesses, including cancer, and diseases of the neurological, immune, and reproductive systems.

Today I want to discuss another disease commonly caused by toxics: Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), also called Environmental Illness (EI). This illness, often triggered unexpectedly by a toxic exposure, leaves the person suddenly with very little energy for everyday activities and a drastically lowered tolerance for the wide range of toxics found in our everyday lives. Once a patient has this diagnosis, nearly all of their attention goes into creating a safe personal environment, avoiding toxics, and looking for ways to nurture their body back to health. Often they have no energy left to stop toxic exposures at their source, and thus one of my reasons for working on these issues is to speak up for them.

However, MCS is not just about the people with this disease, who are often described as "canaries in the coal mine." This phrase comes from the days when coal miners brought canaries with them underground to warn them when invisible gasses such as methane were at dangerous levels. When the canary stopped singing, the workers knew it was time for an immediate evacuation.

Similarly, folks with MCS show the rest of us what happens to people in all walks of life when our bodies stop being able to handle our culture's



It's Our Birthday!!

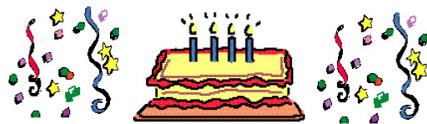
With this issue, we're celebrating 10 years of publishing *The Next STEP (TNS)*!

The goal of this innovative City project is to nurture a healthier Sebastopol for everyone by reducing our exposure to toxics.

Thus we encourage voluntary reductions in the use of toxics in all areas of our lives — including our homes, schools, businesses, parks, food, and environment.

TNS is produced by a small team of local citizens, working on a volunteer basis (which keeps costs very low) because we support this goal. We're grateful to the City Council and staff for acting in the community's best interest with this project.

Please fill out the enclosed survey card to give us your feedback about our efforts. Also let us know how we can best support your toxics reduction in the upcoming year, including any questions, tips, story ideas, or success stories. Your support is what makes this project possible. Thank you!



toxic onslaught. When I hear about the difficulties of those with MCS, I'm reminded once again how much cheaper and more effective it is to prevent such diseases by avoiding toxic exposures at the start.

While the medical profession still wrestles with the complexity of MCS/EI, there are resources to help patients, including the nonprofit MCS Referral & Resources (www.MCSRR.org) and the coalition CFCCC (www.CFCCC.net), whose membership includes the informational newsletter, *Canary Times*.

Chemical Trespass & Body Burden

In December 2009, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released its *Fourth National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals*. In it, the CDC reported on its tests for 212 toxic chemicals in the bodies of participants in its National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. The study's goal was to better understand Americans' exposure to toxic chemicals and use this data to help direct public policy.

There was some good news in the CDC's report, such as a continued drop in lead levels because of its removal from products such as paint and gasoline. However, the study also shows once again the degree to which chemicals have permeated everyone's bodies, even those of us who avoid using toxic products.

For instance, the CDC's report finds that the bodies of nearly everyone they tested contained toxics such as mercury, perchlorate, bisphenol A (BPA), acrylamide, perfluorinated chemicals (including PFOA from non-stick pans), and the flame retardant BDE-47.

Of course, the CDC cautions that participants had varying levels of these toxics, and that lower levels might not cause harm. However, common sense suggests that it's not a good idea to regularly carry multiple toxics in our bodies. More importantly, the results demonstrate how much we're all being exposed to a range of toxics without our permission (aka "chemical trespass"). That to me is why meaningful remedies must go beyond personal product choice.

Although this report examined 75 more chemicals than the previous report, the CFCCC notes that there is still a "huge gap in knowledge" about chemical contamination, given that there are 239,000 chemicals in registries worldwide.

To read the CDC's report, see www.cdc.gov/exposurereport. For more about our modern chemical "body burden," see www.chemical-bodyburden.org/whatisbb.htm.

Update on California's Green Chemistry Initiative

In previous newsletters, we've discussed the progress of California's pioneering Green Chemistry Initiative as it moved from an innovative idea into the structures of government. The prospects for it looked positive until recently when its path took a negative turn.

In fact, according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), the current proposed regulations have strayed so far from their original objectives that the plan's original authors, lawmakers, and thirty-three community groups have called for the draft regulations to be withdrawn, even though this means

missing the Jan. 1, 2011 deadline.

The EWG says that, while an earlier version of the regulations had the "qualified support of a broad array of stakeholders," the state Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) has now "gutted" the proposed rules. Assemblyman Mike Feuer, author of the California Green Chemistry law which created the program, says that the proposal "fundamentally [alters] the approach called for under legislation I authored."

Hopefully, these voices will be heard and the regulations can be returned to their original visionary path. For more about the issues and current status, see www.ewg.org/release/lawmakers-researchers-doctors-reject-schwarzenegger-flawed-green-chemistry-proposal.

Timely Tips

■ **Upcoming Community Toxics Collections.** One of the most important ways we can protect human health, natural ecosystems, and our water supply is to always dispose of toxics properly.

Sonoma County residents have the convenience of bringing toxic items to the Household Toxics Facility at the County dump. We can also drop them at a Community Toxics Collection, which occur on Tuesdays at rotating county locations.

The next date in Sebastopol is March 8. An appointment is required, so call (707) 795-2025 at least 24 hours in advance. There's no fee for Sonoma County residents; bring your ID.

For more about what's accepted and not, plus information about transporting toxics and business disposal, go to www.recyclenow.org and click on "Toxics."

■ **Discard electronics safely.** Remember that unwanted toys do *not* go in the trash! Instead, drop them at the nonprofit Computer Recycling Center (CRC, www.crc.org), which is one of the few operations that seeks to first repair and reuse electronics before recycling

them. More dropoff options are at www.recyclenow.org.

■ **The TNS Online Index** makes it easy for you to look up past newsletters by topic. You can quickly discover what's toxic, and the effective alternatives, in everything from landscaping to pest control.

Look there for seasonal tips, such as: less-toxic approaches to ants and mold; less-toxic pet care, including flea management; healthier housecleaning and air fresheners; and buying organics to avoid toxics and nurture health. www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html

ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP (TNS) is published six times a year by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program (STEP)**. **STEP is a project of the City of Sebastopol**, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **STEP's mission** is to support city residents in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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