



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Why Toxic Products Stay on the Market So Long

As we consider how to protect ourselves and our communities from toxic materials, one significant question that comes up is why products that are known to be toxic stay on store shelves as long as they do.

A new report from the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) helps shed light on this question. Titled *The Delay Game: How the Chemical Industry Ducks Regulation of the Most Toxic Substances*, this study describes the methods that chemical companies commonly use to thwart and delay regulation of their toxic products, often for decades.

The Four Dog Defense

Companies accomplish these delays, says the NRDC, by using “a well-recognized series of tactics” that were first developed by companies seeking to deflect evidence of the hazards of tobacco, lead, and asbestos. These methods have become so predictable that they’ve earned a nickname: “The Four Dog Defense.”

In this approach, a corporation that’s presented with persuasive evidence of its product’s harm doesn’t address these concerns, but instead seeks to avoid responsibility using these four responses:

1) My dog does not bite. The company first denies that its product is harmful, giving misleading information, telling outright

lies, falsely attacking the studies that show harm (and their authors), and commissioning biased studies to make their products seem safe.

2) My dog bites, but it didn’t bite you. Even if a chemical is shown to be harmful, the company insists that no one is exposed to it. Because there’s usually little or no monitoring, the company can erroneously claim that an absence of data demonstrates a lack of exposure.

3) My dog bit you, but it didn’t hurt you. Even if it’s clear that people or animals are being exposed to the chemical, the company denies that it causes harm. For instance, it claims that the scientific studies don’t apply to real world conditions.

4) My dog bit you, and hurt you, but it wasn’t my fault. Here, the company admits that the chemical is making people and ecosystems sick, but seeks to shift blame elsewhere, for instance on improper use, existing medical conditions, smoking, and other chemical exposures.

Companies can make these assertions directly through various media, or indirectly through paid consultants, scientists, and trade associations. While there are certainly times when these arguments could be true, companies too often use them to unfairly avoid accountability. The NRDC’s report illustrates this process via three case studies.

The industry succeeds with this delaying strategy, says the NRDC, because of significant design flaws in our current regulatory system, including a lack of enforceable deadlines for chemical assessments, allowance for “acceptable” levels of

toxic exposure, and an “innocent until proven guilty” approach that puts the burden of proof on the government instead of requiring that companies demonstrate product safety before release. Thus, a company just has to raise questions and resist data requests to keep their harmful products on the market.

The NRDC’s Proposed Solution

The NRDC’s recommendation for addressing this system dysfunction is for Congress to strengthen the federal Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) to give the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the authority it needs to protect our health.

The report’s specific recommendations include: shifting the burden of proof for safety from the EPA to the chemical industry; establishing firm deadlines for the EPA to complete chemical assessments; allowing the EPA to set interim health-protective standards until assessments are complete; and giving the EPA clear authority to get information on chemicals, require testing, and act to protect the public when chemicals are known to be unsafe.

You can help encourage safer products by voicing your support of TSCA reform at www.saferchemicals.org. Also, don’t assume that products are safe just because they’re for sale. Read labels carefully, and get further information online. Thankfully, there are healthier options — and business opportunities for the companies who offer them. We don’t have to keep playing this toxic delay game!

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Read “The Delay Game” at www.nrdc.org/health/thedelaygame.asp. • Learn more about how “The Precautionary Principle” prioritizes community protection at www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precautionary_principle.

It’s Raining Roundup

Two new studies done in the Mississippi River watershed and Iowa consistently found glyphosate (Roundup’s key ingredient) in the region’s streams, rain, and air. The researchers say that this demonstrates how this toxic material predictably moves from its point of use into the broader environment, and in significant amounts. By this process,

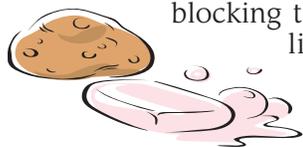
See Roundup, over



Should Everyday Consumer Products Contain Triclosan?

The antibacterial chemical triclosan was originally developed as a surgical scrub for medical professionals. However, it's now commonly found in soaps, deodorants, toothpastes, mouthwashes, and cleaning supplies, as well as embedded in products such as toys, socks, bedding, and kitchen utensils. Its use is so prevalent that studies have found it in 60% of U.S. streams, and 75% of American's bodies!

While manufacturers claim that triclosan is safe, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has registered it as a pesticide and considers it both a human health and an environmental risk. It's a probable carcinogen and a possible endocrine disruptor, potentially altering hormone regulation and blocking the metabolism of thyroid hormones.



This material is also toxic to aquatic bacteria, harms life's essential diatom algae, and breaks down into dangerous materials, such as chloroform and dioxin-like compounds. It's a persistent organic pollutant, meaning that it remains in the environment, bioaccumulates in higher concentrations up the food chain, and is nearly impossible to remove from our body's fat cells. Its frequent use risks the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Experts also question whether triclosan offers its claimed benefits in everyday use, making these risks especially unnecessary. For instance, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says that soaps with triclosan don't offer any benefit over soap without it; and there's no evidence that triclosan-embedded cutting boards protect against bacteria.

According to Kristin Schafer of Pesticide Action Network, triclosan "disrupts hormones and messes with our immune systems, thyroid function, and (for the males among us) sperm production." She wonders why we would expose ourselves to

that "when studies show that washing up with plain old soap and water prevents disease just as well."

These concerns have led some companies to remove triclosan from their products. U.S. Representative Edward Markey is calling for stronger regulations, saying, "Consumers — especially parents — need to know that many of these products are not only ineffective, they may also be dangerous." The FDA indicates that it's currently reviewing triclosan. However, it's been promising to take action on concerns about triclosan since the material was first used in 1972, but it hasn't yet.

Luckily, you don't have to wait for regulators. Just look at your household products to see if any contain triclosan, then decide for yourself if you want it in your home.

SOURCES: "Pesticide-free soap — finally!", by Kristin Schafer, Aug. 24 2011, www.panna.org/blog/pesticide-free-soap-finally • "Antibacterial Chemical in Household Soap Under Investigation for Associated Health Risks," www.thelohasian.com/2010/04/anti-bacterial-chemical-in-soap-under.html • Triclosan, www.health-report.co.uk/triclosan.html • Wikipedia www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triclosan

Roundup, continued

it can harm other plants, crops, ecosystems, animals, and people, as well as pollute our air, drinking water, and food. These studies were conducted as part of the U.S. Geological Survey's National Water Quality Assessment program.

Glyphosate is the nation's most widely used herbicide. In 2007, hundreds of millions of pounds were used in U.S. agriculture, homes, gardens, and industry.

The material is acutely toxic to humans and animals, with exposure symptoms that include burning skin and eyes, blurred vision, rashes, difficulty breathing, asthma, headaches, nausea, nose bleeds, lethargy, and dizziness. It's been linked to increased rates of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, birth defects, miscarriages, attention deficit disorder, lowered sperm counts, and thyroid, pancreas, and liver tumors.

Glyphosate has also been shown to harm fish immune systems, cause

genetic damage in fish and frogs, and kill beneficial insects and earthworms. The European Union has classified it as "dangerous for the environment" and "toxic for aquatic organisms." There's also been an increase in fast-growing glyphosate-resistant "super-weeds."

These two new studies add to the concerns about glyphosate, which isn't as benign as some people think! They also demonstrate that pesticides can cause harm far beyond their original application sites.

SOURCES: "U.S. Geological Survey Technical Announcement: Widely Used Herbicide Commonly Found in Rain and Streams in the Mississippi River Basin," Aug. 29, 2011, www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2909 • "U.S. researchers find Roundup chemical in water, air," by Carey Gillam, Aug. 31, 2011, Reuters, www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/31/us-glyphosate-pollution-idUSTRE77U61720110831 • Herbicide Factsheet: Glyphosate, Journal of Pesticide Reform, Winter 2004, www.pesticide.org/get-the-facts/pesticide-factsheets/factsheets/glyphosate

The TNS Online Index makes it easy for you to look up our past articles on toxics and alternatives in everything from housecleaning to pest control. See 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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