

# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future



A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Answering Your Questions

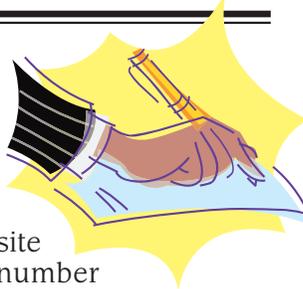
■ **When's the next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day?** Community Toxics Collections occur every Tuesday from 4 to 8pm at various Sonoma County locations. The next Sebastopol one is **August 14**. To make an appointment, call (707) 795-2025 or (877) 747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event. Also, the Household Toxics Facility is open for dropoff, Thurs. through Sat., from 7:30am to 3:30pm at the Petaluma Central Disposal Site. There's no cost to County residents with ID.

■ **Is there email delivery of the TNS newsletter?** Yes, that's available! Folks in or out of City limits can email that request to [STEP@healthyworld.org](mailto:STEP@healthyworld.org).

■ **What is toxic?** Common household items that are toxic and don't belong in the trash include: Insecticides, weed killers, and other pesticides; pool chemicals; batteries; many household cleaners; fluorescent bulbs; nail polish and remover; wood finishes; paint and paint thinners; solvents; oil and filters; fuels; engine cleaners; and brake fluid.

■ **How can I find out more about discarding these everyday toxics?** For additional specifics, see the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency's website [www.recyclenow.org](http://www.recyclenow.org) or its Recycling Guide in your AT&T yellow pages. Or call them at (707) 565-3375.

## Thank You For Your Feedback!



**Thank you to all the Sebastopol residents who took the time to send in your STEP Survey cards.** We appreciate hearing your thoughts about the newsletter, including how you use it and what articles you'd like to see in the future.

So, what were your responses?

■ **87% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "Always good practical info — love this!", "You're doing a great job!", "I enjoy your newsletter," "Thank you! :-)", and "Just keep it coming!!"

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **20% said that you use pesticides at home or work** — a notable decrease from last year's 33%! **Of these, 35% use only natural/nontoxic pesticides**, 10% use synthetic/toxic, and 55% use both.

■ We're delighted that **58% of you said that this newsletter has helped you reduce or avoid the use of toxics.** That really makes our work feel worthwhile!

For instance, readers reported that you "no longer use RoundUp," "no longer use any pesticides in [your] yard," "purchase different home cleaning products now," "bought the nonstick fry pan that was recommended," and "don't buy strawberries unless they're organic."

You feel that "the [newsletter's] synthesis of the research is great" and appreciate the "practical tips," "alternative suggestions," "good remind-

ers," "progress reports," "info stats," and website references. A number of you indicated that the newsletter helps reinforce your existing less-toxic choices. For instance, one reader said that *TNS* has helped them resist the temptation to use RoundUp. You're also glad that the newsletter helps you be "more aware" and "more conscious," "keeps us up to date," and offers this information to the overall community.

**Congratulations to everyone who's finding ways to reduce or avoid using toxics. With these choices, you're supporting a healthier and safer water supply, town, and environment for yourself, your family, and our community.**

**Also thank you for your excellent questions and ideas for future articles;** you'll find answers already appearing in this issue, and in upcoming editions.

Additionally, as always, we appreciate your acknowledgment of our work. We're delighted to be of assistance.

**Please keep your feedback coming!** Your input helps us create a newsletter that's useful for *you!*



"Thank you for educating the community. I often pass along your web address and share the paper version too."

~ TNS Reader



### Did You Know?

***The Next STEP* costs the City almost nothing.** Created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense, it costs about \$100 a year plus in-house copying. This is literally a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's \$10 million annual budget. Given the consistent evidence that common toxics are harming us all, this is a bargain for our shared health, now and long into the future.

## Squirrel Away

A reader asks, "Would you please do an article on squirrels? I have way too many in my yard and they are ripping up my garden and digging in all the flower pots. Thank you."

Well, at first I had to adjust my thinking, because I've loved squirrels since I was a child, with their big fluffy tails bouncing and balancing as they skitter along the tree branches. Did you know that squirrels are in the same family as chipmunks and prairie dogs, and are found in most parts of the world? The eco-wonkish might enjoy reading more at [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squirrel](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squirrel).

But I wanted to help, so I called our local eco-committed Harmony Farm Supply & Nursery ([www.harmonyfarm.com](http://www.harmonyfarm.com)) and talked with General Manager Rick Williams. He advised first checking that squirrels are actually causing the problem. If so, **Harmony offers a few products that can be sprayed or spread to deter them.** Another



option is **getting an owl box, cat, or dog** to discourage them.

**Other remedies that I found online include:** covering the dirt with hardware cloth (with holes cut for the plants), putting metal collars on your trees, moving your birdseed off the ground in an appropriate feeder, and using sound and light devices. Two more options are:

■ **Castor Oil.** Water your vegetable garden with a mix of a half cup castor oil and two gallons of water. This repels the squirrels and is fine for the garden. (Rick suggests washing sprayed produce before eating.)

■ **Cayenne Pepper.** Dust the seeds in your bird feeder. It's OK for birds but repulses the squirrels.

Whatever you do, please **don't use squirrel poison**, which can harm pets and other wildlife. **Rick also reminds folks not to try to eliminate all squirrels, or any other so-called "pests,"** but rather to look for ways to live in balance with these creatures who share our world.

working, and to educate fisherfolk not to eat the fish. (The multilingual signs are being ignored.)

DDT is a persistent organochlorine insecticide that bioaccumulates in fat and magnifies up the food chain, threatening humans, birds, and more. It can cause seizures and has been linked to breast and other cancers, male infertility, miscarriages, developmental delay, nervous system harm, and liver damage. DDT has been largely banned in farming worldwide, although it's used somewhat for disease vector control. Its U.S. ban is considered a major factor in the bald eagle's comeback from near extinction. This toxic material is still found in almost all U.S. blood samples and often in our food.

This story reminds us that our harmful choices can cause damage far longer than we imagine. Thus it's vital that we "look before we leap," assessing risks and heeding warnings instead of just charging ahead with the latest new technologies.

*SOURCE: "EPA mystified by stingy DDT pollution in San Francisco Bay," by Jason Dearen, Associated Press, March 17, 2012*

## Timely Tips

**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 to pet care.

For instance, here are some seasonal topics of interest, including some that readers asked about in the survey. Get more information about each by looking under the **bolded** word in the Online Index at [www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html).

- Healthier **housecleaning**
- Nontoxic **gardening**
- Safer **pet care**
- Less-toxic approaches to **ants, snails, mold, rodents, earwigs, and weeds**
- Repelling **mosquitoes** without toxics
- Buying **fish** varieties that contain less mercury, and helping get it out of our shared environment
- Protecting **teenagers** from toxics at their summer jobs
- Keeping toxics out of our waterways by bringing your car to a **carwash** instead of washing it in the driveway

"[M]an is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself."

~ Rachel Carson

## DDT Persists in the San Francisco Bay

Although the toxic pesticide DDT was banned in the U.S. in 1972, its harm lingers today. Even here in the Bay Area, it continues poisoning fish and threatening human health, despite numerous cleanup attempts.

One source of Bay contamination is a canal near Richmond. Here, 50 years ago, California officials discovered that a pesticide processing plant had discharged large amounts of DDT, from the 1940s to 1966. In 1982, the canal had the highest levels of DDT and the pesticide dieldrin ever recorded in the state. It was designated a Superfund site. In 1990, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency listed the plant and canal as one of the most polluted spots in the U.S. and started a laborious and costly cleanup process.

But success has been limited. Recent fish tissue tests found DDT and dieldrin at the same levels as in 1994, or higher. Now the EPA is launching a plan to understand why this isn't

## 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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