

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Protecting Children From Toxic Harm

In previous issues of *TNS*, we've talked about how **children are especially vulnerable** to health harm from everyday exposure to hidden toxics. Seeing this connection is vital both for people who want to protect the children in their lives, and those who care about this country's health care costs and future well-being.

So I was glad to see Pesticide Action Network (PANNA) pull together key current scientific data on this topic in its recent report, "**A Generation in Jeopardy: How pesticides are undermining our children's health and intelligence.**"

The report's authors reviewed over 200 studies linking pesticides with childhood diseases, plus government data about the rates of these illnesses. They found that American children are experiencing drastic increases in diseases such as ADHD, autism, learning disabilities, childhood cancers, early puberty, and more. They also summarize the evidence connecting these illnesses with pesticide exposure, even at very low levels, and through various routes.

We need to bring this information into our public conversation about escalating health care costs.

Surely avoiding illness is the best remedy for everyone.

Consider for instance these report findings:

■ Of the four million U.S. children born each year, between 400,000

to 600,000 have a **developmental disability such as ADHD, autism, and lower IQ levels**. This is a stunning 10 to 15% of the total, and a rise of 17% over the past 15 years.

■ Over 10,000 U.S. children are diagnosed each year with **cancer**, and the incidence of the two most common childhood cancers (leukemia and brain tumors) has risen 40% and 50% respectively since 1975.

■ More than seven million U.S. children are affected by **asthma**, a huge increase from two million in 1980.

The costs of these diseases are staggering, even just in financial terms. For instance:

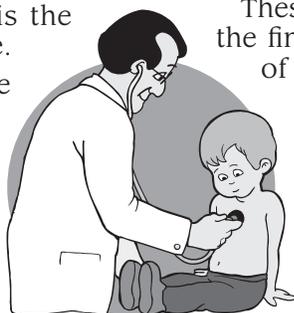
■ Caring for an **autistic** person over their lifetime costs an estimated \$3.2 million.

■ The cost of one **child's cancer** — including treatment, lab costs, and lost parental wages — is estimated at \$623,000 a year. So society's cost for the 10,400 newly diagnosed cases each year is roughly \$6.5 billion.

■ The total U.S. annual health care costs for **ADHD** are estimated at between \$36 and \$52 billion.

■ Families nationwide pay a total of \$14.7 billion a year for the medical costs of **asthma**. Asthma's direct and indirect costs to the U.S. economy are an estimated \$19.7 billion.

These numbers don't include all the financial and emotional costs of these illnesses to families and our society, including those from lost productivity, life potential, and community participation. Anyone who's seen a serious illness



strike a child knows just how especially painful it is.

Kristin Schafer, PANNA's Senior Policy Strategist and a report co-author, notes that other factors can also contribute to these illnesses, including genetics and other environmental contaminants.

However, she says, "**pesticide exposure is a piece of the puzzle that we can do something about** — if we set our minds to it, roll up our sleeves, and work together to make change." She hopes that this report will "be used to jumpstart a long overdue national conversation about how pesticides are undermining our children's health and intelligence — and how we can do better.... It's high time we make our children's health a national priority."

Of course, we often hear that children's health is important. But it's vital that we back up these words with meaningful action that addresses the systemic causes of these diseases.

Schafer also notes that, while it's important to reduce our individual exposure, "**household choices alone cannot solve this problem. It's just too big....** We need policies at the local, state, and national level that will bring these numbers down.... And we need them urgently."

I'd add that we can't just wait for our government leaders to make these changes for us. Luckily, we're not alone in wanting change, and there are wonderful groups taking effective action that we can collaborate with and support.

One easy thing we can do to help this process is to read and share PANNA's report, especially with parents, educators, and health professionals. See www.panna.org/blog/protecting-kids-pesticides-its-time.

For more about individual and community-level actions we can do to protect children, see www.healthychild.org, www.saferchemicals.org, www.MomsRising.org, and www.Non-ToxicKids.net. You can also get lots of useful information in our STEP Index of past issues at www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html.

The next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day is Tues. Dec. 18. Make an appointment at 795-2025, at least 24 hours in advance. Free to County residents with ID.

How Chemical Industry Lobbying Keeps Toxics on the Shelves

A recent *New York Times* column sheds light on a key reason toxic materials stay on the shelves for so long — chemical industry lobbying.

For example, the industry is currently pressuring Congress to cut off money for the *Report on Carcinogens*, a 500-page consensus document published every two years by the National Institutes of Health. It contains the best information about what materials cause cancer. But it seems the industry doesn't want the facts about their products revealed.

Column author Nicholas Kristof says, "If that sounds like shooting the messenger, well, it is." He adds that it would be fine for them to debate the report's content, but trying to stop it altogether by such behind-the-scenes means "is an insult to science and democracy alike."

Lynn Goldman, Dean of the School of Public Health at George Washington University, comments, "The way the free market is supposed to work is that you have information.... They're trying to squelch that information." Barbara K. Rimer, Chair of the President's Cancer Panel, says, "Without this program, there would be a gap in the protection of the public."

Kristof notes that the American Chemistry Council "has a long record of obfuscation, borrowing the same strategies that the tobacco industry used to delay regulation of cigarettes." Jennifer Sass, a Senior Scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council agrees, saying "It's the same playbook."

SOURCE: "The Cancer Lobby: If chemicals are carcinogens, should the government hide that information?", by Nicholas D. Kristof, New York Times, Oct. 6 2012

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According to the nonprofit Common Cause, the industry has also used lobbying to block attempts by health advocates to strengthen the very weak federal Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA).

In its new report, "Toxic Spending: The Political Expenditures of the Chemical Industry, 2005-2012," the group notes that TSCA hasn't been updated since it was passed in 1976 — 36 years ago! During that time, we've seen many largely-untested chemicals added to our everyday lives, and increasing evidence of their harm. Surely it's not a coincidence that we've also seen large increases in industry lobbying expenditures. In federal politics, they've doubled since 2000, and total \$375 million in the past seven years.

This study brings together key specifics about what's being spent, who receives it, and their governmental roles and responsibilities. It also offers specific ways we can improve the transparency and controls over this political spending.

James Browning, Common Cause's Regional Director for State Operations and a principal author of the report, says, "The dimensions of chemical industry spending documented in this study ... are staggering." He also notes that the actual amounts spent are probably higher, because of gaps in disclosure laws.

I know that it can be frustrating to hear about this kind of unfair influence over our democratic processes. However, only by seeing how this works, and acting to stop it, can we reclaim our democratic and human right not to have toxics invade our bodies and harm our health without our informed consent.

You can read the report, share it with others, and learn more about Common Cause, at www.commoncause.org.

SF Toxics Info Online

The City of San Francisco Department of the Environment (aka SF Environment) has developed a wide range of innovative policies and programs to "promote social equity, protect human health, and lead the way toward a sustainable future." This includes action on toxics reduction, and they've put lots of useful information on toxics and alternatives online. Check it out at www.sfenvironment.org/toxics-health.

Honoring and Emulating Rachel Carson

"E: The Environmental Magazine" recently offered a lovely look at the inspiring work of Rachel Carson and her book *Silent Spring*, which 50 years ago spearheaded the environmental movement that has made so many improvements in our lives and our world. What a great model she is, inspiring us to stand up today for what matters most in life. See www.emagazine.com/magazine/the-book-that-changed-the-world.

Carson's work for a healthier world is being continued by the Silent Spring Institute. This organization collaborates with health professionals and community advocates to develop science that serves the public interest. It especially seeks to "identify and break the links between environmental chemicals and women's health, especially breast cancer" and "help save lives and stop people from getting sick in the first place." Carson died of breast cancer just two years after *Silent Spring* was published.

Connect with the Institute at www.silentspring.org and www.facebook.com/silentspringinstitute.

"If we are going to live so intimately with these chemicals — eating and drinking them, taking them into the very marrow of our bones — we had better know something about their nature and their power."

~ Rachel Carson

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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