

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Superstorm Sandy Stirs Up Toxics

Much has been written about October's Superstorm Sandy (aka Hurricane Sandy), which caused extensive damage across 24 U.S. states, especially New York and New Jersey.

Among its extreme impacts were surging waters that filled New York subways, washed away 50 feet of the iconic Atlantic City Boardwalk, devastated many thousands of homes and businesses, shut down power and transportation systems, compromised hospital care, and more. It's estimated that the storm cost \$65 billion in damage and business interruption, which would make it the second-costliest Atlantic hurricane, only behind Hurricane Katrina.

But one of the Superstorm's barely-reported impacts was from the toxics it carried in its floodwaters, then dispersed onto people's land, homes, buildings, waterways, etc. How many people, creatures, and ecosystems have been harmed by exposure to this toxic brew?

To understand the scale of this, just think how many toxic materials are used and stored in various ways in homes, businesses, factories, and refineries — often in ways that don't anticipate flooding. This includes materials we forget are toxic, such as gasoline and car fluids. Then think of how many places the stormwaters went, picking up and depositing toxic cargo along the way.



I was happy to see *The Huffington Post* carry an article that discussed the industrial chemicals and other debris that filled New York City's flooded waterways.

This article focused largely on the neighborhoods near two toxic Superfund sites. It quoted the region's EPA administrator saying that little could be done right before such an event to avoid problems, and that the real solution is comprehensive cleanup of the sites. One City Councilmember did send an email, warning people not to touch the water, sediment, or debris from the storm. However, folks in that area lost Internet service and didn't get the email before going outside to survey the damage.

But I think that the risks here go far beyond Superfund sites, and any meaningful cleanup tends to be very expensive and time-consuming. Given the scale of this storm, it's unlikely that toxic protocols will be used at most locations.

Therefore I think that true solutions can only come when we recognize that disasters will inherently spread any toxics that we use. We can't keep being surprised by this!

Thus the most sensible and cost-effective solution is not to try to manage toxics after their release, but instead to prevent problems by drastically trimming our use of toxics in the first place. (For more about how toxics cause harm throughout their lifecycle, see www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex under "Lifecycle costs.")

Luckily, we all can be part of the solution, by remem-



It's Our Birthday!!

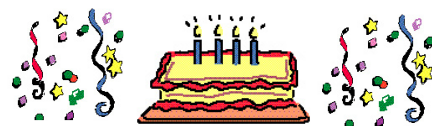
With this issue, we're celebrating 12 years of publishing *The Next STEP (TNS)*!

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!



bering these lifecycle costs each time we consider using a toxic material, and asking ourselves if we really need to cause that harm. Often it's just not needed, with all the many wonderful less-toxic alternatives available.

We can also feel good each time we choose not to use a toxic, appreciating the lifecycle harm we've avoided. Through this, we can all help protect the places that we all live.

SOURCE: www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/30/hurricane-sandy-sewage-toxic-_n_2046963.html

Of Pumice & Whiteflies

■ **Cleaning with pumice.** In previous editions, we've talked about how you can clean most of your home with just a few simple nontoxic materials. (Read more about this via our TNS Online Index; see box right.)

For the next tier of tools in your less-toxic cleaning kit, consider getting a pumice scouring stick. This nontoxic 100% natural volcanic rock can remove stains (including hard water stains) from porcelain toilet bowls, tubs, sinks, and showers. It also works on ceramic tile, ovens, grills, iron cookware, and more.

It's easy to use. Just wet the stone and gently rub it on the surface. This creates a paste that removes stains pretty quickly.

Important: Be sure to read the box to confirm that it works on your target material, as it can scratch some. Test on a hidden spot if you're not sure.

■ **Managing whiteflies.** A reader asked how to manage whiteflies nontoxically. So I called Harmony Farm Supply, where Patty Hamilton recommended these products.

• **Neem oil** (by Green Light). This traditionally-used natural material from India's neem tree disrupts the insects' life cycle at all stages. It also works for other pest problems.

• **Sticky Aphid/Whitefly Traps** (by Seabright). These traps use a nontoxic odorless adhesive in an easy-to-hang weatherproof package.

• **Vegol.** This non-petroleum oil suppresses insects at all stages.

Important: All these products are OMRI-approved and acceptable for use on organic farms. Not all products of this type are, so be sure to always read pest product labels. Don't accept vague claims that something is green or "eco." For more on this, see *Assessing Labels* at www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol5no4.pdf.

So how can you tell if the pests you have are whiteflies? Touch the plant and if they all fly up quickly then back down to the plant, they're probably whiteflies. Also look under the leaves for eggs. You can bring samples into Harmony for identification.

Also, be sure that you're watering and fertilizing your plants sufficiently. The few times I've had whiteflies, I'd been late in watering those plants. When I did water them, they perked right up and the whiteflies went away.

■ **About Harmony Farm Supply & Nursery.** We're lucky to have the widely-respected Harmony Farm Supply & Nursery in our backyard. They've long been committed to organic and less-toxic approaches, and have remedies to address a variety of pest problems. Their website www.harmonyfarm.com has more about their products and offerings, including their free workshops on various gardening techniques. Or go to their store, on Hwy 116 just past Graton Road on the left. (707) 823-9125

Pesticides in the Rain

Protecting ourselves from toxic pesticides begins with not using them ourselves. However, we can also be impacted by other people's use in various ways — including through the rain!

The U.S. Geological Survey studied various agricultural areas (including in California) and often found pesticides in the rainwater, including herbicides and insecticides.

This shows once again how anyone's choice to use toxics impacts others, and protecting ourselves from toxics must include protecting our shared environment. (*Journal of Environmental Quality*, www.crops.org/publications/jeq/abstracts/37/3/1101)

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.

Newsletter Editor, Lead Writer & Layout: Patricia Dines, Email STEP@healthyworld.org

Newsletter Editorial Team: Patricia Dines and Jim Gleaves

Newsletter Design Concept & Logo Design: Lyn Dillin (née Bouguereau)

STEP Founders: Michael Black, Patricia Dines, Rebecca Dwan, Jeff Edelheit, Nan Fuchs, Craig Litwin, and Larry Robinson.

STEP, P. O. Box 1776, Sebastopol CA 95473 www.ci.sebastopol.ca.us

Printed on recycled paper.

Essential Connections

■ **To learn more about what's toxic, and where to discard items,** see www.recyclenow.org or the Yellow Pages Recycling Guide. Or call 565-3375.

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day** is Tues. March 13, 4 to 8pm. Call 795-2025 to make an appointment, at least 24 hours in advance. Or drop items at the Household Toxics Facility, Thurs. through Sat., from 7:30am to 2:30pm, at the Petaluma Central Disposal Site. Both services are free to County residents with ID. See www.recyclenow.org for more information.

■ **Our new TNS email list makes it easy** for you and others to hear when STEP newsletters are put online. Anyone can get on this very low-volume list (about 6 emails a year); just go to www.healthyworld.org/EList.html.

■ **You can also look up previous newsletters by topic using the TNS Online Index.** In past editions, we've discussed everyday toxics and the effective alternatives in a wide range of arenas. For instance, here are some of the topics we've explored. (To learn more about each one, look under the **bolded** word at www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html.)

- Healthier **housecleaning**
 - Nontoxic **gardening**
 - Safer **pet care**
 - Less-toxic approaches to **ants, snails, mold, rodents, earwigs, and weeds**
 - The specific issues with toxics such as **Roundup** and **2,4-D**
 - Evidence of toxics being linked to **health and environmental harm**
 - **Government** and community-level actions we can support
- **I invite you to share the good news about *The Next STEP* newsletter and Online Index with your friends, family, neighbors, roommates, and tenants.** Our goal with this community project is to be available to everyone in Sebastopol!