

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



About The Next STEP Project & Design

A Personal Note from Patricia Dines, Editor of The Next STEP

As most readers probably know, *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter is designed to offer you useful, high-quality, and inspiring information that helps you avoid our culture's increasingly-common everyday toxics and choose healthier options instead. "It's your friendly guide to less-toxic living!"

You likely also know that TNS is produced by volunteers, as a service to our community; and that STEP stands for "Sebastopol Toxics Education Program."

However, there's more to this story — because this newsletter is more than just a publication. I call it an "innovative City-community collaborative project." And our goal with it is not just to benefit individuals, but also to help residents work together in creating a healthier, safer town.

This project's foundation is the City of Sebastopol's May 1999 resolution declaring Sebastopol a Voluntary Toxics-Free Zone. In that resolution, the City committed to avoid using toxic pesticides on City-owned property, including in parks and play areas, and to help residents voluntarily reduce their use of toxics, through various possible avenues. (See www.healthyworld.org/STEPRes.html.)

The City Council said that it made this commitment "because we want to live in a safer environment and leave our children and

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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?

■ **92% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "GREAT NEWSLETTER. Love it!", "I think the information you provide is excellent," "I enjoy reading it and learning from it," "Keep up the good work!", and "Thank you!"

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **64% said that you use pesticides at home or work. Of these, 43% use only natural/nontoxic pesticides,** 2% use synthetic/toxic, and 55% use both.

■ We're delighted that **77% 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, because of our articles, you "stopped using toxic drain and oven cleaners," "no longer use snail bait," "changed cleaning toxics to green," "[are] using Borax more often," and "removed mildew using tea tree oil." One reader said, "We stopped using weed killers on our grass years ago, thanks to TNS!"

Other readers appreciated that we alerted you to the potential

hidden toxics in clothes and other products; offered less-toxic solutions for housecleaning, ants, and garden pests; gave instructions for using alternatives such as a pumice stone; indicated "what *not* to put in the garbage"; suggested "better places to drop off [items]"; gave "general reminders of the hazards of toxics and pesticides"; provided "an influx of fresh ideas"; brought awareness to toxics; and "reinforced my feelings to never use pesticides again." Two folks even raved about our TNS Online Index. Yay!

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.

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!



"We stopped using weed killers on our grass years ago, thanks to TNS!"

~ 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.

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their children a healthy world in which the air is safe to breathe and the water is safe to drink." Isn't that a wonderful vision for a City to have?

Unfortunately, though, the City didn't have the funds or in-house knowledge to produce these public outreach projects. Thus it turned to the community and asked for our help in making them a reality.

One of the projects discussed was a newsletter, and since toxics issues have been one of my specialties as a professional freelance writer, I was a natural choice for Editor. I chose to accept that role, even though it's been a lot of work without pay (and I have bills like everyone else). But I loved that the City had this vision, and I was enthralled by the opportunity/challenge of working with the community in making such a shift for our shared well-being.

Thankfully, a few other folks stepped forward to help, and thus in 2001 *The Next STEP* was born. The City decided to put TNS in the water bills, both to protect our shared water supply from toxics, and as a convenient way to reach most residents without any added postage cost.

In the 12 years since then, many other community members have stepped up to support this project in various ways, including writing articles and stuffing envelopes. I've been grateful for everyone's participation, and enjoyed the chance to engage with other folks who care.

For each issue that we create, the writers and editorial team do a lot of work, including: reading a wide variety of resources and perspectives; distilling what we determine are the key facts and actions readers can take to protect themselves; writing our findings in an accessible way, with citations; doing the graphic design; and delivering a final newsletter to the City. Then the City copies this in-house and distributes it to you.

As a result of this structure, the City gets the benefit of having an innovative and successful project which serves the town and its vision, with very little cost or effort required from them. It's a win/win/win!

Over the years, the specifics of this project have been collaboratively shaped by its stakeholders, including newsletter volunteers, City staff, the City Council, and readers.

For example, from the start we've done an annual reader survey to make it easy for readers to share their needs, which we then always seek to incorporate. So, for instance, readers often ask us to describe clear tangible actions they can take to avoid toxics exposure, and thus we seek to consistently provide this "easy action" information.

Another choice that you might have noticed we made early on has been to discuss both individual and community-level actions that you can take to protect yourself, your family, and our community.

We do this because we observe that individual action and product choices, while important, aren't sufficient. For instance, what can we do when products have toxics that aren't revealed on the label? Or someone else is using toxics that impact us? What if the government is considering requiring better labeling or controls, or potentially exposing us to added toxics? We take our mission seriously, and notice that sometimes protecting ourselves requires addressing the decisions that make hidden exposure possible.

The outcome of all our collaborative efforts is this newsletter. Ta-dah! We truly are delighted to hear that it's working for so many of you, and that you're making use of our information. And I remain grateful that the City and community have cared enough to maintain this wonderful goal and vision for our community.

I also hope that TNS helps you feel a little more empowered overall. I think it's exciting to know that we aren't powerless to external harm, and that we together can tangibly create a healthier, safer world.

You can read more about this at www.healthyworld.org/STEP-HistoryDesign.html.



Answering Your Questions

■ **When's the next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day?** On **August 20**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call (707) 795-2025 or (877) 747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event.

■ **How do I know what's toxic?** For more about what's toxic and how to discard it, see the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency's website www.recyclenow.org or its Recycling Guide in your AT&T yellow pages. Or call them at (707) 565-3375.

■ **Is there email delivery of the TNS newsletter?** Yes, that's available! Folks in or out of City limits can sign up at www.healthyworld.org/EList.

■ **How can I find your useful information about my particular topic of concern?** You can use the TNS Online Index to quickly discover what's toxic and the effective alternatives. For instance, look under these **bolded** words in the Index at www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html.

- Healthier **housecleaning**
- Nontoxic **gardening**
- Less-toxic approaches to **ants, snails, mold, and weeds**
- Repelling **mosquitoes** without toxics
- Less-toxic **paints and stains**

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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