



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Are You Tracking in Toxics with Those Shoes?

As we look at how to protect our homes and families from toxic invaders, I think one exposure route can easily go unnoticed: The toxics (and other yuk) that we and others carry in on the soles of our shoes.

It can seem like a minor thing, until you think about all the surfaces your shoes touch in a day — lawns, sidewalks, driveways, and the floors at work, school, stores, etc. Each of these can hold a wide range of stuff that your shoes can pick up, including asphalt chemicals, engine oil, industrial pollution, heavy metals, animal waste, allergens, bacteria, gum, bugs, mud, and pesticides.

Then, blissfully unaware, you walk inside your home — and transfer all these materials from your shoes onto your carpets and floors. From there, anyone can be exposed when they breathe the air, touch the surfaces, and walk or sit on the floor — including babies (who are especially vulnerable to toxics) as they crawl, explore, and put everything into their mouths. Studies have shown that shoes are a significant way that toxics can enter our homes.

Make a Mat for It

Your first solution to this is easy: put a rough-textured doormat outside each exterior door. Ideally, also put an absorbent one inside each door. Then it's easy for folks to wipe their feet and keep their detritus out of your house.



Remove Your Shoes

The other key solution is for you and your guests to leave your outdoor shoes at the front door.

This simple act offers many added benefits, including reducing allergens in your home, keeping floors pretty, saving time vacuuming, reducing scratches on hardwood floors and wear-and-tear on carpets, making it safer to sit on the floor, quieting your footsteps for downstairs neighbors, and extending the lifetime of floors, which reduces replacement costs.

Here are some easy ways you can make this convenient for everyone:

■ **Put a chair or bench in your entry area**, to make it easy for people to take off their shoes.

■ **Set up shelves, baskets, or cubbyholes for folks to put their shoes**, so that it all feels orderly.

■ **Have indoor shoes available**, such as slippers. (I got fun silk ones in San Francisco's Chinatown!)

■ **Hang a cheerful sign with your request**. Mine says, "Please remove your shoes/Then help yourself to the indoor shoes on the top shelf."

■ **Teach your children to remove their shoes when entering your home**. Consider buying them shoes that are easy to remove.

■ **Mention your practice in party invitations**, so people can plan their outfits accordingly. Maybe relax your rule for formal parties.

■ **Decide how strict you're going to be about this**. My choice is to make the request, perhaps with an explanation phrase, but not push if someone feels uncomfortable.

STEP Updates

■ **Thanks to everyone who sent in your yellow STEP Feedback cards**. Your comments really do help us serve your needs. As usual, we'll report the survey results in the next issue.

■ **If you can't find your card, you can get a substitute** at www.healthyworld.org/STEPsurvey.html. If you're a Sebastopol resident, please write that on the printout, plus your name and address.

■ **Thank you also to this year's fabulous and much-appreciated STEP Stuffers**. Twice a year (in December and January), we invite folks to help us stuff the yellow Feedback cards into the water bills. These have actually turned into fun little social events, as we playfully gab together while feeling happily productive in community service.

This year's STEP Stuffers were Judy Wismer*, Sharron Joyce*, Marilyn Madrone, Linda Webster, Jerrine Egloff, and Joe Connolly. (*Judy and Sharron are *Special* STEP Stuffers, because they helped at both sessions!) Marilyn said, "I come here for my fun" and Judy riffed, "For a good time, call..."

If you want to be invited to play with us next year, just sign up at www.healthyworld.org/EList and check the STEP stuffings option.

Wendy Priesnitz in *Natural Child Magazine* says that we can see removing our shoes as leaving the world's problems outside as we enter the haven of our home. I like that!

So, does any of this really make a difference? Actually it does. The (aptly named) "Door Mat Study" found that using doormats cut the toxic lead dust inside houses by almost half. Removing shoes cut lead dust by 60%. Doing both eliminated 98.5% of toxic dust over a five-month period.

Such an easy way to feel safer in the sanctuary of our homes.

SOURCES: "Please Leave Your Shoes by the Door," By Wendy Priesnitz, *Natural Child Magazine*, www.naturalchildmagazine.com/0804/please_leave_your_shoes_by_the_door.htm • "Leave It at the Door," University of Georgia Cooperative Extension, www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/pubs/hace/HACE-E-81.pdf

BPA, Go Away

You've likely heard of BPA (bisphenol A), the industrial chemical used in making many of our everyday products. Unfortunately, humans can often be exposed to this toxic material as it easily leaches out of items such as baby toys and pacifiers; plastic cups, bottles, cooking utensils, and food storage containers; and metal cans for food, drink, and infant formula (which can have BPA in their lining).

Studies have linked BPA exposure to health problems, including breast and prostate cancers, early puberty, miscarriages, diabetes, behavioral problems, ADHD, autism, childhood obesity, and impaired immune systems. These can occur at exposure levels well below what the Environmental Protection Agency considers "safe." We're all so commonly exposed that 93% of us have BPA in our bodies, and at levels shown to cause harm in animal studies. Children are especially vulnerable.

Sarah Janssen of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) says, "[BPA] really shouldn't be in our food supply."

However U.S. federal regulators have been slow to protect us from BPA. Some governments have banned it in some baby products (Canada, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates, and some U.S. states, including California). Pressure from consumers and groups has led some U.S. stores to pull some BPA baby products from shelves and

some manufacturers to remove it from baby bottles and sippy cups. In 2012, the FDA finally banned BPA in these latter two products, though just because of "abandoned" use.

But there still are many products bringing BPA into our bodies. For instance, in 2009, scientists at Harvard University published research showing that college students who drank from BPA sports bottles had 70% more BPA in their bodies than when they used stainless steel bottles.

And a 2011 study, conducted by the Silent Spring Institute and the Breast Cancer Fund, found that avoiding food packaging for only a few days significantly reduced the levels of BPA and DEHP (diethylhexyl phthalate) in people's bodies.

In that study, participant families ate organic meals for three days, with no canned food and minimal plastic packaging. They stored food in glass and stainless steel containers and didn't eat at restaurants. During this special diet, the average BPA levels in their urine decreased by more than 60%. But when participants returned to conventional diets, their BPA levels returned to pre-intervention levels.

Ruthann Rudel, Research Director of Silent Spring Institute and lead author of the study, says that this "provides compelling evidence that removing BPA and DEHP from food packaging would substantially reduce exposures for adults and children." These results were also confirmed by a recent study published in *Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology*.

But Rudel also cautions, "As we replace BPA and DEHP, substitute chemicals need to be tested for safety before they're put into use so we don't end up with a revolving door of hazardous chemicals in consumer products."

So how can you reduce your exposure to these chemicals? Key steps include: Using a BPA-free reusable water bottle (unlined stainless steel is ideal); avoiding plastic packaging and cooking tools; storing food in glass and stainless steel containers; cooking more meals at home with fresh organic ingredients; skipping canned food, soda, beer, and infant

Timely Tips

■ **You can safely discard your unwanted toxics at the County's Toxics Collection Days. The next Sebastopol ones are on March 25 and August 19**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call (707) 795-2025 or (877) 747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event.

■ **The TNS Online Index makes it easy for you** 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**
- Less-toxic approaches to **ants, snails, mold, and weeds**

formula; and not microwaving any plastic food containers, even those labeled "microwave safe."

Also be sure to support the non-profits that are informing us and acting for more protective regulations, such as the groups mentioned in this article. We shouldn't have to worry about what's in our food!

SOURCES: Environmental Working Group, www.ewg.org/sites/humantoxome/chemicals/chemical.php?chemid=100357

- www.ewg.org/research/timeline-bpa-invention-phase-out
- www.silent.spring.org/tooclosetohome/food-packaging
- www.switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/sjanssen/china_bans_bpa_leaving_us_behi.html

Protecting Our Water Supply

The current drought has reminded us all just how precious our water supply really is. Water is essential not only for our drinking needs, but also to support our farmers and ranchers, lush vistas, healthy ecosystems, and wild creatures.

Our shared well-being also depends on our water's quality, so in times of scarcity it's even more vital that we protect it from our everyday toxics. Two of Sebastopol's five municipal wells have been threatened by toxic contamination.

The good news is that you can help protect our water supply every time you reduce your use of toxics. That's one of the reasons this newsletter is in Sebastopol's water bills!

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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