

# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future



A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## 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?

■ **90% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "Keep up the good work. I always read *TNS* and find new info," "Keep going — every article is helpful!", "Love it!", and "Thank you."

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, just **36% said that you use pesticides at home or work. Of those using pesticides, 42% use only natural/nontoxic pesticides**, 2% use synthetic/toxic, and 56% use both.

■ We're delighted that **73% 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 our information has helped you use less-toxic approaches to ants, snails, weeds, cabbage moths, housecleaning, oven cleaning, sunblock, and creating your "natural garden."

You also appreciated our tips for keeping carpets clean, buying shower curtains, bypassing anti-bacterial soap, and avoiding the hidden toxics in "bedding and furniture."

(One reader said that they put a hold on their new couch order, and are looking for a less-toxic option instead!) The newsletter also helped a reader persuade their spouse not to use Roundup, and inspired an HOA property to choose and implement a "no toxics" rule.

Overall, you feel that *TNS* covers "a good range of issues," and you value our research, statistics, news updates, and "citations [of] medical consequences." You're glad that *TNS* reminds you "what not to buy" and increases your "overall awareness."

**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!*

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"Keep up the good reporting. I read STEP cover to cover each month."  
~ TNS Reader  
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## Answering Your Questions

■ **Can I get 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](http://www.healthyworld.org/EList).

■ **When's the next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day?** On Tuesday **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. You can also drop items at the Household Toxics Facility.

■ **How do I learn more about identifying and discarding everyday toxics?** See the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency (SCWMA) website, [www.recycle.now.org](http://www.recycle.now.org), or its Recycling Guide in your AT&T yellow pages. Or call them at (707) 565-3375. (Also, to answer a question, nail polish *is* discarded as a toxic.)

■ **How can I find your useful information about my particular topic of concern?** Just use the STEP 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](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html).

- Healthier housecleaning
- Nontoxic gardening
- Less-toxic approaches to ants, snails, rodents, and weeds

■ **How do I degrease my drain?** A reader asked for drain cleaning options, including for "de-greasing" their drain.

See *Answering*, over

### 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 \$11 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.

## Skip the Microbeads

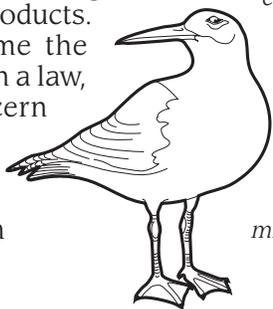
Microbeads. Manufacturers have been adding them to countless products, including facial scrubs, exfoliants, body washes, soaps, shampoos, and toothpastes. A single facial cleanser container can contain over 300,000 of them. But we might not even realize that these barely-visible hard plastic balls are hiding inside.

However, these materials are having a very real impact as they flow down our drains through our wastewater plants to our rivers, lakes, oceans, and water supply. Sewage plants aren't designed to catch them, so they easily slip through. Once in the environment, they can readily absorb and carry toxics. They're also eaten by fish, shellfish, birds, and other wildlife, because they look like food. But, by displacing real food and carrying toxics, they can cause creatures to fall ill and starve. Plus, the plastic gets stored in their tissues, bioaccumulates up the food chain, harms whole ecosystems, and can get into our food supply. Yum!

It turns out that microbeads are actually one of the significant sources of the plastic pollution that's been littering even the most remote areas of our oceans. They're being found throughout the marine environment, from Los Angeles to the Great Lakes to the North Pole. In a New York study, over half the plastics collected on Lake Erie were microbeads.

"Microplastic is now a ubiquitous contaminant in the Pacific Ocean — and seas around the world," says Marcus Eriksen, a scientist with the 5 Gyres Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to eliminating plastics in the world's waterways. A big problem is that plastic isn't biodegradable. Over time it breaks into smaller pieces, but it persists in the environment.

Some states are considering banning microbeads in products. Illinois might become the first state to pass such a law, though there's concern about its long timelines, with deadlines in 2017 and 2018. Proposed legislation



in California and New York offer more aggressive phaseout timelines. The California bill would prohibit the sale of most products containing microplastic, but allow those with small amounts. A few manufacturers have promised phaseouts, but with unclear timing and criteria.

### What you can do

**1) Avoid health and beauty products with microbeads.** Look for "microbeads" in the product description, or "polyethylene" or "polypropylene" in the ingredients. Also tell manufacturers that you want them to get the beads out.

**2) Choose products with biodegradable scrubbing materials instead.** This can include ground almonds, oatmeal, pumice, walnut husks, apricot kernels, and salt crystals. There are many products available from both mainstream and natural brands, as well as offerings from local herbalists. (I personally use Apricot Facial Scrub from Solum & Herbe, a once-local herbalist now based in Seattle. They do mail order and this scrub is sold at Rosemary's Garden.)

**3) Consider making your own scrubs.** This lets you create exactly what you want and often save money. For easy recipes, see [www.sheknows.com/living/articles/956905/how-to-make-your-own-exfoliating-scrub](http://www.sheknows.com/living/articles/956905/how-to-make-your-own-exfoliating-scrub).

**4) Support strong state and federal bills banning microbeads.** Find out more about the California bill (including the groups supporting it) at <http://bit.ly/1tF69R7>.

**5) Learn more about this issue, and the actions you can take, at [www.5gyres.org](http://www.5gyres.org).**

*SOURCES: "Microbeads a major problem in L.A. River," by Louis Sahagun, L.A. Times, Jan. 25, 2014, [www.latimes.com/science/la-me-0126-microbeads-20140126,0,7492777.story](http://www.latimes.com/science/la-me-0126-microbeads-20140126,0,7492777.story) • "New York, California move to ban beauty products containing microbeads," by John Upton, Grist, Feb. 14, 2014, [www.grist.org/news/new-york-california-move-to-ban-beauty-products-containing-microbeads](http://www.grist.org/news/new-york-california-move-to-ban-beauty-products-containing-microbeads) • "Lawmakers Want To Change How You Wash Your Face And Brush Your Teeth," by Kim Bellware, The Huffington Post, April 17, 2014, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/17/microbeads-ban-illinois\\_n\\_5169895.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/17/microbeads-ban-illinois_n_5169895.html)*

### Answering, continued

For our past articles on this, see the STEP Online Index under "Drain declogging." However, with grease and oil, the most important solution is to not put it down your home drain at all. That's because it accumulates and congeals in the sewage system's pipes, which is expensive to remove, and can cause messy and costly clogs and backups in our homes, neighborhoods, and environment. This happens even if we put oil down the drain with hot water, a garbage disposal, or a degreasing agent.

So, instead, pour or scrape leftover grease and oil into a container (say, near your stove). Cover it tightly or let it congeal before putting it in your black garbage can. For longer storage, put it in the fridge or freezer. Also, wipe greasy pans and plates with a paper towel, or wait for the grease to congeal and scrape it off.

For larger quantities of oil, you can also filter and freeze it for a future meal. Or drop off clean strained vegetable oil to be made into biodiesel. Find dropoff locations under "Oil, Cooking" in the SCWMA Recycling Guide (described above). Or contact Yokayo Biofuels [www.ybiofuels.org](http://www.ybiofuels.org) (707) 472-0900.

■ **How can I conserve water?** A number of you wanted to know more about conserving water. You can find more of my suggestions for joyfully aligning our lives with water's ways in my March Ask EcoGirl column. The web version also has added resources. [www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl7e.html](http://www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl7e.html)

## 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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