

# THE NEXT STEP

*Toward a Healthier Future*

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



## Skipping the Dryer Sheet Toxics

Sebastopol resident and *TNS* reader, Marcy Gordon, emailed me and asked that we encourage folks to avoid toxic dryer sheets, to protect themselves and others.

She said, "I don't use them, but I can't avoid their use by others.... Certain times of the day I can barely breathe as I pass house after house pumping out toxic clouds of dryer sheet scent chemicals from their dryer vents." She noted that this impacts everyone's air quality.

I was glad to hear her concern, and decided to learn more about this common household product. I found out that U. S. consumers spent \$659 million on fabric softener dryer sheets in 2013. I also learned that the chemicals in these (and other laundry products) not only get into our air and water, but are also deposited on our clothes, where they can get on our skin and into our bodies, and be released as we wear them in a day.

Unfortunately, labels aren't required on dryer sheets, so we often don't know what's inside. And just switching to a liquid fabric softener isn't enough, because these too can contain hidden toxic ingredients.

According to Michelle Schoffro Cook, author of *The Brain Wash*, the main ingredients found in most commercial dryer sheets and fabric softeners include chloroform,



ethyl acetate, benzyl alcohol, alpha-terpineol, linalool, and pentane. The health impacts of these materials can include headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, neurological disorders, and loss of consciousness.

Plus, most of these products contain "fragrance" ingredients, which also aren't required to be identified and can actually be petrochemical toxics with serious acute and chronic health impacts. (See "Perfume Dreams," [www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol4no6.pdf](http://www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol4no6.pdf).)

### What you can do

#### ■ Choose healthier dryer sheets.

Look for ones that have *only* plant-based ingredients (not petroleum) on unbleached paper or cloth (not plastic) with true essential oil scents (not vague "fragrances") or scent-free. It's great if they're also recyclable and/or compostable.

■ **Try a healthier fabric softener instead.** Even the eco-ones aren't necessarily pure, so look at the ingredients on the company's website to be sure they'll meet your needs.

■ **Put a few drops of a true essential oil on a rag or dedicated cloth, then put that in the dryer.** This adds a healthy scent, saves you money, and avoids single-use waste. Have fun playing with different fragrances! If you want to have some prepared, just cut rag cloth squares, put scent drops on each one, and place them in a tightly sealed jar.

■ **Dry synthetic clothes separately or on a line.** Synthetics are usually what cause static cling. And, if your clothing is mostly natural fiber, static might not even be an issue.



## It's Our Birthday!!

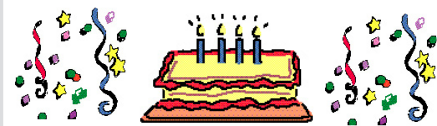
With this issue, we're celebrating 14 years of publishing *The Next STEP (TNS)*!

Our goal with this innovative City project is to nurture a healthier Sebastopol for everyone by reducing our exposure to toxics.

Thus, we help folks reduce the 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!



■ **Add a quarter cup of white vinegar or baking soda to your wash cycle.** Either one will soften and freshen clothes while reducing static cling. You can even mix essential oil into the vinegar before pouring it in the machine. An easy solution!

**Important:** Don't use vinegar with bleach, as mixing them releases toxic chlorine gas.

I hope you find these options helpful in creating your healthy home. I also invite you to let me know what alternatives have worked for you.

## Free Paint Available

Could you use some free paint or wood stain? Are you flexible on the color and brand? Or do you perhaps need some primer?

If so, I have good news! Sonoma County residents can get a wide range of paint and stain options for free, in their original cans, at the Sonoma County dump (located halfway between Cotati and Petaluma).

So, what's the source of this bounty? The leftover paints that we community members deposit at the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency's Household Toxics Facility, Community Toxics Collections, and Toxic Rover Pickup Service.

Now, the Agency's website primarily describes its offer of free five-gallon mixed latex paints, which it creates by combining various products into a few basic colors. But I was delighted years ago when I went to the facility and discovered that they also have products in original cans, which allows me to read the labels. You know how I love to do that! And what a deal for anyone working on projects or improving their house. The savings do add up!

This product giveaway is also a wonderful example of win/win community reuse, as it keeps these materials out of our environment while reducing the County's costs for managing hazardous waste.

To check it out, go to the Central Disposal Site on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 7:30am-2:30pm.

These items and more are in three storage units in the lower reuse area, near the Household Toxics Facility. The earlier you come in that time period, the better your selection. Also, please take just what you need, so there's enough for everyone.

## Discard Your Techno-Gear Wisely

If Santa brought you new techno-gear this year, be sure to discard your old items responsibly. Hopefully you know that technology (anything with a circuit board) doesn't go in the garbage, because it contains toxic materials that go from landfills into our shared environment.

So you might be thinking about dropping your old items at one of the e-waste (electronic waste) events that you periodically see promoted.

Those services are better than the trash. But the unfortunate downside is that most of these places just disassemble equipment for raw materials — even if items are still working. This squanders all the energy and resources that went into producing these tools, and deprives someone else of the chance to use them instead of buying something new.

So, before you drop your technology at one of these sites, I encourage you to first take these steps:

**1) Try to repair your tech.** This respects all the embedded costs and impacts that went into making it.

**2) If your unwanted item is still working, offer it to someone who can use it.** This might be a friend, school, or thrift store. Or perhaps put a post on craigslist. You can either offer it as a free donation or for a price, whatever you prefer.

**3) Working or not, donate it to the Computer Recycling Center in Santa Rosa ([www.crc.org](http://www.crc.org)).** This nonprofit donates and sells working equipment. It also seeks to repair items, and, if it can't, it'll use the parts from non-functioning pieces for other repairs. Through this, they get fuller use of our tech before sending it out to pasture. Also note that CRC sells used equipment and offers repair services to the public.

## Quick Steps

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Days are on Tuesday January 6 and March 31**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call (707) 795-2025 or (877) 747-1870 at least 24 hours beforehand. You can also drop items at the Household Toxics Facility. Get more specifics on this, and toxics disposal in general, at [www.recyclenow.org](http://www.recyclenow.org).

■ **You can get email delivery of the TNS newsletter.** Folks in or out of City limits can sign up at [www.healthyworld.org/EList](http://www.healthyworld.org/EList).

■ **STEP articles are available for reprint or adaptation in your periodical.** Contact me (the editor) for more information!

## Good News From Minnesota

We've previously talked about triclosan, the chemical being added to everything from soap to toys to cutting boards with the promise of protecting users from bacteria.

Unfortunately, for decades, critics have said that it's actually no more effective than plain soap and water — and is compromising the health of people and the environment. (For more, see [www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol11no6.pdf](http://www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol11no6.pdf).)

So I was delighted to hear that Minnesota became the first U.S. state to ban triclosan from personal hygiene products, including soap, deodorant, toothpaste, and mouthwash (though not until 2017).

The lawmakers hope that this action will encourage triclosan elimination elsewhere in the country. Some companies are already phasing out this material, due to consumer pressure. Still, triclosan remains in 75% of liquid soaps and body washes on store shelves.

*SOURCE: "Minnesota Becomes the First State to Ban Controversial Anti-Bacterial Soap Ingredient," by Susan Cosier, OnEarth Magazine, May 26, 2014 [www.alternet.org/environment/minnesota-becomes-first-state-ban-anti-bacterial-soap-ingredient](http://www.alternet.org/environment/minnesota-becomes-first-state-ban-anti-bacterial-soap-ingredient)*

### 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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