

# 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?

■ **84% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "Excellent" and "It's GREAT! Thank you!"

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, only **35% said that you use pesticides at home or work. Of those using pesticides, 65% use just natural/nontoxic pesticides**, a notable increase from last year's 42%. Of the rest, 13% use synthetic/toxic products, and 22% use both.

■ We're delighted that **65% 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 buy less-toxic products, switch to less-toxic cleaning products, stop using toxic dryer sheets, properly dispose of medicines and other products, and handle ants and garden pests.

You've also appreciated discovering the free reuse paint at the dump and getting the latest news and information on this topic. One reader said that, because of our information,

they stopped their pest control service from using rat poison. Another commented, "I'm going to show my mom the article on dryer sheets. ☺♥"

Other readers said: "I don't use toxics but I always learn from your newsletter," "I just feel encouraged and supported in what I already do," and "The reminder and specific articles have pushed me to no longer use any [toxics] around house and garden. Thank you!"

**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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"I'm grateful this city is forward-thinking enough to provide this information."

~ TNS Reader

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## Easy Answers

■ You can get answers to some of your survey questions about toxics and alternatives via **The STEP Online Index** at [www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html). Just look up your desired subject to read our past articles on that topic. For instance, we have articles under these **bolded** words.

- Healthier **housecleaning, gardening, and paints & stains**
- Less-toxic approaches to **ants, snails, fleas, weeds, earwigs, crabgrass, oxalis, and poison oak**

• Methodologies that avoid toxics, such as **permaculture** and **IPM** (Integrated Pest Management)

• Evaluations of specific toxics, including **Roundup**

• Proper everyday **toxics disposal** (including old paint)

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day is on Tuesday August 11**, 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.

■ **For more about local toxics disposal**, see [www.recyclenow.org](http://www.recyclenow.org) or call (707) 565-3375.

■ **Anyone can get the TNS newsletter by email.** Just sign up at [www.healthyworld.org/EList](http://www.healthyworld.org/EList). (Sorry, we don't have a separate snail mail list.)

■ **Please let us know if you have a toxics question, article idea, or success story!**

### 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.

## Don't Be Fooled by Hidden Toxics

Are you or people in your life using toxic pesticides without even realizing it? Unfortunately, folks can only look at a product's benefit claims and not consider that there's a toxic inside.

For instance, a while back, I had a conversation with an acquaintance who was certain that they didn't use pesticides — without realizing that their dog's "flea dip" was one! (See [www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol6no1.pdf](http://www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol6no1.pdf).)

Or consider the common "weed and feed" products. Each year, Americans apply an estimated 27 million pounds of these to lawns, parks, cemeteries, and more. I wonder how many applicators realize that they're using a toxic herbicide. Worse, that material is often 2,4-D, which has been consistently linked with cancer, neurological disease, reproductive problems, and harm to animals and plants. (See [www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol1no4.pdf](http://www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol1no4.pdf).)

So, folks can unknowingly bring a poison into their land, water, and homes (via shoes). Plus, it's not even the best weeding remedy, and can actually harm lawns. (See [www.eartheasy.com/blog/2010/06/6-reasons-to-avoid-using-weed-n-feed-on-your-lawn](http://www.eartheasy.com/blog/2010/06/6-reasons-to-avoid-using-weed-n-feed-on-your-lawn).)

These are just two examples of why it's so important to read past the cheerful marketing statements on labels and seek to understand the products' risks. That's especially vital with any material claiming to kill a plant, insect, or creature. By definition, that makes it a "pesticide," warranting further investigation.

The first thing to look for on a pesticide label is a large key word Danger, Warning, or Caution. These are legally defined indicators of acute (immediate) risk. If it says Danger or Warning, consider looking for a less-toxic remedy. The usage instructions also reveal potential harm. So if a label says to avoid spraying the product in bodies of water, it likely harms creatures there. For more on evaluating pesticides, see [www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol5no4.pdf](http://www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol5no4.pdf).

## Buying Organic Fertilizers

So let's say you want to skip the toxics by buying organic fertilizers. Good choice! Unfortunately, though, that's not as easy as looking for the word "organic" on a label. U.S. organic standards only cover food, so garden products can carry the word "organic" without meeting the national organic standards.

So what can you do? Look for the OMRI logo. This independent non-profit certifies products for use on organic farms. You might also see: "This product is listed by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) for use in organic production."

Otherwise, look for a phrase like: "Meets the requirements of the National Organic Program (NOP) for use in organic production." In California, making such a claim requires registration with the Cdfa. In other states, check to see if there's any government or third party verification of a product's organic claims.

SOURCES: [www.organicitsworthit.org/grow/identifying-organic-fertilizers](http://www.organicitsworthit.org/grow/identifying-organic-fertilizers) • [www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/jfldrs/fertilizer\\_OIM.html](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/jfldrs/fertilizer_OIM.html)

## The High Cost of That Deal

"Dollar" stores seem to offer a great bargain. Unfortunately, though, toxics often come with the deal.

A recent study of four of these discount chains, in six states, found that 80% of the products tested contained significant amounts of chemicals linked to birth defects, learning disabilities, early puberty, asthma, and more. There were earrings with lead at 6,548 ppm (way over the legal limit of 100 ppm for kids), plastic tablecloths with 1,028 ppm of lead, and plastic pencil pouches with a phthalate type that's been banned from children's toys. Other toxic products included dolls, children's backpacks, pencil cases, toy cars, Christmas lights, yellow duckies, bathtub appliques, rug pads, and dozens of other household items.

This is not a minor problem. The top four dollar store chains operate almost 21,500 stores in the U.S.

(compared to about 4,000 Walmarts) with combined annual sales of \$36 billion. They're often a community's only convenient retail option, and also function as a regular grocery store. These toxic health impacts just add to the burden of their frequent low-income customers.

The real remedy is strengthening our national toxics law (TSCA), as we've discussed previously. In the meantime, the Campaign for Healthier Solutions, a coalition of over 100 diverse organizations across the U.S., is calling on discount retailers to step up their game.

Specifically, it asks these companies to "adopt and implement strong corporate policies to identify and disclose chemicals in the products they sell, prioritize the most harmful chemicals for elimination, and replace toxic chemicals with proven safer alternatives." Failing to do so, it says, risks health harm to customers and financial harm to companies from high-profile negative events.

To learn more, and support the campaign, go to [www.ej4all.org/campaigns-and-activities/campaign-for-healthier-solutions](http://www.ej4all.org/campaigns-and-activities/campaign-for-healthier-solutions).



### 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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Printed on recycled paper.