

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?

■ **86% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "You're doing great," "Keep up the good work!", "I'm a fan," "Thank you very much for all your efforts," and "Thank you!"

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **39% said that you use pesticides at home or work. Of those using pesticides, 56% use just natural/nontoxic pesticides,** 15% use synthetic/toxic products, and 29% use both.

■ We're delighted that **68% of you said that this newsletter has helped you reduce or avoid the use of toxics,** which is a slight increase from last year. That really makes our work feel worthwhile!

For instance, readers reported that our information has helped you avoid using Roundup, microbead products, toxic dryer sheets, and other harmful materials.

You've also valued learning about proper disposal of toxics, and less-toxic approaches to housecleaning, ants, and garden pests.

One reader said, "[You] help me find interesting solutions to problems."

Another remarked that the newsletter "just reminded me to go to the dropoff site for disposal." Other readers commented that you appreciate the reminder "to always be conscious" and our support of "general awareness." Plus folks said that you've forwarded this information to others, which is wonderful!

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 always glad to get your newsletter; I always learn something. The latest issue about safe handling of art supplies is especially useful for me.

"I appreciate that here, as always, your advice is practical. Thank you very much."

~ Carol Goodwin Blick

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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. 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, mosquitoes, earwigs, fleas, weeds, poison oak, blackberries, rodents, and mold**

- Methodologies that avoid toxics, such as **permaculture** and **IPM** (Integrated Pest Management)
- Evaluations of specific toxics, including **Roundup** and **2,4-D**
- Proper **toxics disposal** (including **pharmaceuticals**)

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day is on Tuesday December 6,** 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 or call 707/565-3375.

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

■ **Please tell us your toxics questions and successes!**

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 Just Toss That Cigarette

It can seem so easy (and even cool) to just toss an unwanted cigarette remnant out the car window or onto the ground. After all, they're just tiny things, how much damage could they do? And they probably just biodegrade anyway, right?

Ah, the very different reality

1) These single butts add up to a real problem. Smokers discard as litter an estimated 4.5 trillion stubs each year worldwide. They accumulate outside of buildings, in parking lots, on beaches, in wild areas, and in our streams and rivers. They comprise an estimated 30% of total litter (by count) on U.S. land, waterways, and shorelines.

2) Each cigarette butt contains harmful materials that can enter our ecosystems, pollute water supplies, and harm wildlife. It's not just the smokers who are at risk. Filters are largely made of plastic fibers that can take up to ten years to degrade. Tobacco contains nicotine, a powerful addictive stimulant that goes straight to the brain and increases heart rate and blood pressure. Ongoing exposure

damages the heart and arteries, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

In addition, pesticides are used to grow tobacco, and can remain in the leaves. Also, potentially hundreds of additives are mixed in during the manufacturing process. There are no legal maximums for any of these chemicals in cigarettes.

3) Cigarette butts can leach chemicals such as cadmium, lead, and arsenic into our marine environment — within an hour of contact with water. The resulting leachate can be acutely toxic to aquatic organisms, including fish. How is this cumulatively harming our ecosystems — and coming back to us in our food and water?

4) Wildlife and pets can consume stubs, potentially causing illness and even death. These butts have been found in the stomachs of fish, whales, birds, and other marine animals, exposing them to hazardous chemicals and risking digestive blockages. Even curious small children have been known to eat these stubs and become ill.

5) Tossed butts can quickly start fires that destroy homes and wild areas, kill people and creatures, and cost millions in

property damage. These fires also add to our community's firefighting costs. This is especially relevant in our drought-stricken area.

6) Cleanup is expensive. Schools, parks, hotels, restaurants, grocery stores, and governments have to pay staff to pick up cigarettes. For example, the City of San Francisco spends an estimated \$11 million a year cleaning up stubs.

7) This litter compromises local beauty and tourist revenue. Who wants to see trashed ecosystems?

Solutions

1) Put your smokes out in a stable ashtray or a bucket of sand. Or douse them with water. Be sure butts and ashes are completely out before putting them in the trash.

2) Gently educate others about proper stubbing.

3) Support groups providing education, and encourage smoke-free policies for outdoor spaces.

And thank you to the reader who requested a piece on this subject.

SOURCES: www.tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/20/Suppl_1/i25.full • www.no-smoke.org/learnmore.php?id=731 • www.longwood.edu/cleanva/cigbuttbiodegradable.htm • <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tobacco> • www.lcc.edu/tobaccofree/environmental

Timely Tips

■ **Safely going back to school.** As parents send their children back to school for another year, it might not occur to them that their young ones could be exposed to toxic pesticides during their school day.

However, schools can use pesticides throughout their campuses — on lawns, pathways, sport fields, playgrounds, and inside buildings.

Intended to kill weeds, insects, and other pests, these pesticides can also harm children's ability to think and learn, the proper development of their bodies, their rates of disease — even their emotional well-being. Children are even more vulnerable to toxics than adults, because their systems are still developing, and they tend to play close to the ground and put things in their mouths.

So how can you find out what's being used at your school? The California Healthy Schools Act can help! It requires California schools to inform parents about pesticide use, and encourages reduction in use.

You can get more information about this law in our prior newsletter, at www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol2no5.pdf. Also see www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/pestmgt/pubs/hsa_factsheet.pdf.

■ **Detoxing your holidays.** As you plan ahead for your winter holidays, there are various ways that you can avoid bringing toxics with them.

For instance: Freshen your air with natural, not synthetic, fragrances. Avoid scented candles unless the package has persuasive information about its lack of toxics. Manage ants and mold in less-toxic ways. Create a sweet sign inviting folks to remove their shoes at the door. Label your

discard system so that it's easy for guests to use.

We have more specifics — plus idea for decorating, gifts, wrapping, discarding, and landscaping — via the STEP Index under **Holidays**.

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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