



# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Safer Holiday Candles

As the holidays near and days shorten, we often light candles to set a cozy, relaxing, or festive mood.

Unfortunately, though, these candles might be emitting materials that risk the health of ourselves, our families, and our guests. (Similar cautions apply to other scent products, including sprays and plug-ins.)

### The Risks

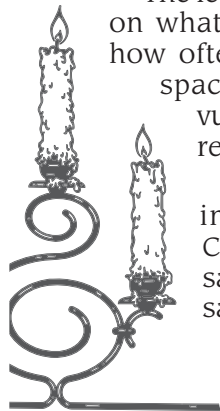
Over the years, various studies, experts, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have brought forward evidence that mainstream candles can put toxics into our air.

This is confirmed by people's repeated reports that candles can bring on headaches, congested sinuses, tearful eyes, and allergic reactions when burned — and even unlit. And that these problems disappear when these candles are removed.

Researchers are also concerned about long-term harm, such as cancer and damage to the lungs, brain, and nervous system. Plus candles' black soot can damage ceilings, computers, and electrical appliances.

The level of harm depends on what candles are used, how often, in how small a space — plus people's vulnerability and current health issues.

And, not surprisingly, The National Candle Association says that candles are safe for our health.



### Materials of Concern

■ **Paraffin wax.** Most mainstream candles are made with this petroleum product. When burned, these candles have been shown to emit toxic chemicals like toluene and benzene.

■ **Metal in wicks.** Using candle wicks with zinc or tin cores can release heavy metals into the air. Lead cores were banned in the U.S. in 2003, but cheap candles from other countries might still have them.

■ **Synthetic scents and colors.** Though scents in products are often marketed as natural, most are actually synthetic chemicals that can cause health issues — from headaches and dizziness, to asthma and even cancer. (For more about this, see the STEP Index under **Perfumes (IV/6).**)

### Choosing Better Candles

Give yourself and others safer scents to breathe deep. Look for:

**1) "100%" beeswax, soy, or vegetable oil.** Get 100%. Even those labeled as just "pure" can be a blend with paraffin! **Beeswax** burns cleaner and longer, doesn't drip, has a naturally sweet scent, and comes in tapers, pillars, votives, tea lights, birthday candles — even Hanukkah candles! You can also buy beeswax sheets and roll your own candles, or melt beeswax granules into glass jars. **Soy** is softer, so "100%" most likely comes in containers and tea lights. Be sure it says that no toxic chemicals were added. Perhaps also look for non-GMO or organic soy.

**2) "100%" non-metal wicks, such as cotton, paper, or wood.** (Check your current candles with

## Local Toxics Disposal

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collections Day is Jan. 8,** 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.

the steps at [www.greenamerica.org/toxiccandles](http://www.greenamerica.org/toxiccandles).)

**3) All natural essential oils** (distilled from plants). These come in a wide range of pleasing, refreshing, and evocative scents.

**4) Non-toxic natural dyes.**

### Other Healthier Approaches

**You can also bring light and scents into your home with:** healthier air freshener sprays, simmering aromatic spices on the stove, diffusers, lamp rings, and battery operated candles (some look pretty realistic!). See the STEP Index under **Air Fresheners (VII/2).**

For additional seasonal tips, look in the STEP Index under **Holidays.**

Article sources and more information are at [www.healthyworld.org/candles.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/candles.html).

## STEP Updates

■ **It was so much fun tabling for STEP at the Sept. 30 Wellness Fair** (next to the Sebastopol Farmers' Market). I shared flyers and free sample issues with people who were delighted to discover this unique, helpful, and free resource!

■ **I've created a new shorter web link for STEP — [www.healthyworld.org/STEP](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEP).** Much easier to remember! From there, you can connect to our existing webpages and look for answers to your specific questions about everyday toxics and alternatives. It's also a simpler way to share this information with others.

~ Patricia Dines

## Book Review: What's Making Our Children Sick?

Book by Michelle Perro, MD and Vinceanne Adams, PhD

Review by Megan Kaun

We all know children with behavioral problems, neurological delays, serious digestive issues, allergies, and other maladies that keep them away from playing and learning — and impact entire families.

A new book, *What's Making Our Children Sick?*, offers a compelling argument that routine exposure to toxic chemicals could be helping to cause an epidemic of chronic childhood illnesses. This includes pesticides in foods, toxics in common household materials, and agricultural chemicals that drift from farms into homes and schoolyards.

I expected this book to focus on the “big” diseases that increasingly plague our children, such as cancer and diabetes. Instead, it focuses on the more subtle hard-to-diagnose illnesses that are nonetheless quite devastating.

Dr. Michelle Perro, MD, brings to this book 35 years of hands-on

experience treating local children at her practices in Sonoma and Marin Counties. Her focus is helping children with illnesses that the current medical system does not yet know how to address. She's found that many of their issues are tied to people's consumption of modern industrial foods. I was surprised to learn how much improvement her patients often see just by switching to an all-organic diet.

Co-author Vinceanne Adams, PhD, backs up these experiences with a meticulous and well-organized presentation of the most recent scientific findings on the subject of the gut/brain connection, and the harm of pesticides such as glyphosate (Roundup's main ingredient).

*What's Making Our Children Sick?* offers inspirational case studies, medical recommendations for restoring health, and an overall hopeful message about our ability to recover after a lifetime of subtle toxic exposure.

Also, because this information is presented in a clear, non-biased, and fact-based way, it's a great resource to take to your pediatrician to facilitate informed conversations.

## The Unacceptable Rates of Disease in U.S. Children

- One in 13 American children today has a **serious food allergy**, an increase of 50% over the last two decades.
- Nearly 9% of our children have **asthma**, more than double the rate in 1980.
- 11% of children are diagnosed with **attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**.
- The rate of **childhood eczema/atopic dermatitis** is nearly 11% in the U.S. overall, and up to 18% in some states. This has doubled in the past several decades.
- Roughly 160,000 children have **Crohn's disease or colitis** (as do 1.6 million Americans overall).
- Roughly 1 in 140 Americans has **celiac disease**, an increase of 4.5 times over the past 50 years. It's especially rising among children. “[A]nd this is before we get to gluten insensitivity.”
- **Gastrointestinal reflux** affects 8% of children. Plus 10% of infants younger than a year with it develop complications significant enough to cause a disorder called GERD.

- **Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)** occurs in 6 to 24% of kids from middle through high school.
- One in 5 children is **obese**.
- Nearly 60% of children experience **chronic headaches**, with 7% of those **chronic migraines**.

~ Excerpted by Patricia Dines from *What's Making Our Children Sick?*

## Learn More About Protecting Children From Toxics

To read more of our articles about childrens' everyday toxic risks and the alternatives, go to our STEP Online Index under **Children**. Our topics there include:

- A report summarizing the drastic increase in U.S. children's illnesses, the evidence connecting these maladies with pesticide exposure (even at low levels and via various routes), and their recommended solutions at both the personal and community levels (*STEP* issue XII/6)
- Studies showing the high levels of childrens' toxic exposure, the links between exposure and health problems, and the notable body toxic reductions from eating organic (*III/3*)
- Childrens' higher vulnerabilities to toxics, exposure avenues at school,

and the Healthy Schools Act (*II/5* and *XII/2*)

- The proven links between exposure and asthma development (*IV/2*)
- Ways to support toxics reduction at day care centers (*VI/5*)

~ Patricia Dines

### 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.

**Newsletter Editor, Lead Writer & Layout:** Patricia Dines, Email [STEP@healthyworld.org](mailto:STEP@healthyworld.org)

**Newsletter Editorial Team:** Patricia Dines and Jim Gleaves

**Newsletter Design Concept & Logo Design:** Lyn Dillin (née Bouguereau)

**STEP Founders:** Michael Black, Patricia Dines, Rebecca Dwan, Jeff Edelheit, Nan Fuchs, Craig Litwin, and Larry Robinson.

STEP, P. O. Box 1776, Sebastopol CA 95473  
[www.healthyworld.org/STEP](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEP)

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• **Got a pest problem?**

• **Or a toxics question?**

• **The STEP Online Index can help!** It makes it easy to look up your topic of interest and find our well-researched, condensed, and useful information — to help you get up-to-speed and into action. It also makes it easy to share this information!

• **[www.healthyworld.org/STEP](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEP)**

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