Local Good News!

I’ve been delighted to see local governments reducing their use of toxic pesticides in public spaces, including halting use of glyphosate-based herbicides such as Roundup.

Through this, they’re making these areas safer and healthier for residents, families, children, workers, pets, wildlife, water supplies, and ecosystems.

The City of Sebastopol helped pioneer this path in 2000, when it committed to skipping all toxic pesticides in City spaces such as parks. (It’s used its exception option only twice since then.) The City wanted to encourage citizens to reduce their toxic use and exposure too, and thus co-created this STEP newsletter.

So it’s great to see more governments getting on this bandwagon. I appreciate all the people and groups making this possible with their encouragement and support. May we continue to do more of the same!

The City of Santa Rosa

There was little fanfare this August 21 when the Santa Rosa City Council voted unanimously to approve a contract with its landscape contractor, Golden Gate Landscape Management (GGLM), that required GGLM to use only OMRI (organic certified) herbicides in managing the City’s parks, median strips, and more. This means that they won’t be using glyphosate-based Roundup or other synthetic herbicides there!

The City publicly signalled this plan in 2017, when it invited landscaping service bids that swapped common chemical products for less-toxic approaches. (For more about the City’s choice and reasons, see our Online Index, under Sonoma County Activities, Issue XVII/3.)

Encouraging Santa Rosa on this path has been a three-year campaign by local groups and individuals, with key leadership from Sonoma County Conservation Action (SCCA) and its Toxic Free Future campaign. Local parent and environmental engineer Megan Kaun has also been passionately advocating for removing toxic pesticides from our local public spaces. She brought this issue to the SCCA and is now on its board.

Another SCCA board member, Anne Seeley, called Santa Rosa’s choice “fantastic.” She considers toxic herbicides “dangerous” and “inappropriate to be sprayed on areas where children [and] pets play.”

Other Santa Rosa entities are also reducing their pesticide use. For instance, since 2015 the Santa Rosa Water Agency has directed its contractor to manage its “urban” lands with only OMRI herbicides. And Santa Rosa City Schools have banned all pesticides that might cause cancer (such as Roundup) and use only OMRI herbicides in their 25 campuses.

Did You Know?
The Next STEP costs the City almost nothing. Created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense, its primary cost is copying. This is literally a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol’s $19 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.
Local, continued

The City of Windsor

The good news continued on Sept. 5 when the Windsor Town Council voted unanimously to ban all synthetic pesticides in town-owned property like parks and trails.

This decision was the result of over a year of work, initiated by a concerned Windsor parent who reached out to SCCA for help. SCCA in turn partnered with other local citizens and groups on this cause.

Elsewhere in Sonoma County

Other local spots are becoming healthier. For example, Petaluma City Schools banned glyphosate-based herbicides in December 2015. The City of Petaluma skips synthetic weedkillers except on its median strips. The City of Healdsburg hasn’t used glyphosate in its City parks, playgrounds, public areas, or landscaped medians since 2017. And the Sebastopol Union School District doesn’t use synthetic herbicides.

What’s Next

This reduction of public toxics is happening because people are standing up for safer community spaces — and some government agencies are being receptive.

But, as Kaun says, “This story is far from over.” Many municipalities are still spraying toxic pesticides on our shared land. Even those that remove one toxic category can still be using other ones!

So ask your schools and parks what pesticides they’re using. If any are toxic, encourage them to replace these with healthier options.

Also, SCCA is encouraging Rohner Park to ban all synthetic pesticides. This is expected to be on their Council agenda in January or February. To sign the online petition, go to https://bit.ly/2Ex881m.

Kaun says that SCCA’s goal is to “get toxics out of all public land in Sonoma County,” including schools and parks. She adds, “It is clear that the public does not want synthetic pesticides used near where they live, work, and play.”


Also look in our Online Index under Roundup and the California Healthy Schools Act (which helps you protect your child at school).


LOCAL TOXICS DISPOSAL

The next Sebastopol Toxics Collections Days are Tues. Jan. 8 and April 9, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours ahead. 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.

Removing Paint Splatters

I recently wanted an easy least-toxic way to remove old paint splatters from my outdoor vinyl window frames. Diving into the Internet, I learned that the challenge was finding something effective that wouldn’t damage the vinyl. After trying various options (including some stronger products that didn’t work), I found one that worked well — rubbing (or isopropyl) alcohol!

I just wet a clean smooth rag with the rubbing alcohol, then rub the paint off. For thicker paint spatters, I wrap the rag around a plastic putty knife and lift the paint gently. (Without the rag, the knife lifts the vinyl too.) I finish with a damp rag, to remove any excess. Ta dah!

Before doing this on your windows, test it in an inconspicuous spot, to see what works for you!

“Always enjoy your Next STEP newsletter, and the new issue is no exception. Thanks especially for all the new-to-me information about candles.”

~ Carol Goodwin Blick

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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