



A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Thank You For Your Feedback!

**Thank you to the 144 Sebastopol residents who sent in your STEP Survey cards!**

We appreciate you letting us know what you think of this newsletter, how you use it, and what articles you'd like to see in the future.

So, what were your responses?

■ **86% said you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Your comments included "Great Articles! Thank you so much!", "Thanks for this wonderful newsletter," "I like the variety of topics, many of which are new to me," "TNS is a great educational tool – I learn something with each edition," "I save all the newsletters," and "Keep up the good work."

.....  
"My thanks to all involved in the production of this informative and innovative newsletter — and to the City of Sebastopol for distributing it with our local billing. What a great place Sebastopol is to live!"

*TNS Reader*

.....  
■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **49% said you use pesticides at home or work. Of these, 37% use only natural pesticides, 31% use synthetic, and 32% use both.**

■ We were delighted that **74% of you said that this newsletter has helped you reduce your use of toxics.** It was valuable to hear your examples, to know what you found useful. Readers said, for example,

that you now: use alternative mold cleaners "instead of resorting to bleach!"; clean with vinegar and baking soda – "No more Ajax, Windex, Tilex"; "cut out toxics in the yard," and "found alternative ways to turn away ant invasions! And they worked."



**Congratulations to everyone who is finding ways to reduce or avoid using toxics!** With these choices, you're supporting a healthier environment for yourself, your family, and your community.

**Thank you for your many excellent questions and ideas for future articles;** you'll find answers already appearing in this issue, and in upcoming editions.

And as always we appreciate your acknowledgement 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!

### 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 \$60 a year plus in-house copying. This is literally a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's \$9 million annual budget. Given the consistent evidence that common toxics are harming us all, this is a bargain for our health, now and long into the future.

## Preventing Paint Pollution

In our Sept/Oct 2003 issue (III/5), we talked about how to avoid toxics when buying paints and stains. (You can find past issues on our website.) Remodeling and painting season is in full swing, so we thought we'd share some additional tips for working with paints and keeping their toxics out of your environment and our shared groundwater.

■ **Before scraping old paint off walls and objects, check it for lead** (which is in most paint used before the 1970s). Inexpensive test kits are available at hardware stores and on the Internet. If you do have lead paint, get advice before proceeding.

■ **Clean brushes and tools properly.** Please don't wash your paint materials in the gutter, as this goes straight into the Laguna without any filtering. With water-based paints, wash them in a sink connected to a treatment plant. For oil-based paints, clean them with thinner, then save the thinner for a Toxics Roundup.

■ **You can put empty, dried out paint cans** in the regular garbage, with the lid off.

■ **You can drop usable latex paint at Paint Exchanges.** Cans must be one-gallon containers or smaller, rust-free, with their original labels, and at least half-full. There are Paint Exchanges at the Transfer Stations at Annapolis (near Sea Ranch), Healdsburg, and Sonoma. (There will also be one at the Household Toxics Facility, when it opens.) Hot Tip: You can also get free paint for your projects at these locations!

■ **Discard all other paint and painting products at a Toxics Roundup or Facility.** This includes water-based and oil-based paints, plus thinners and strippers. Don't put them in the garbage, as this ends up in the landfill which then gets into our water and ecosystems.

For more information, see the EcoDesk box on page 2 (over).

~ Patricia Dines  
with Rebecca Dwan

## Oxalis Obliteration or, The Perils of Sourgrass

Among the readers giving survey feedback were three who were very concerned (some with capital letters and underlines!) about the plant oxalis spreading in their yards. We must live in a pretty nice place for this little flower to be such a problem!

You've likely seen *oxalis pes-caprae* with its bright green clover-type leaves. In spring its low, almost fluorescent, yellow flowers blossom all over town. Even though the best time of year to deal with oxalis is early spring, we want to answer your concerns now, because one good remedy is to plant perennials in the fall that crowd oxalis out of your garden.

*Oxalis pes-caprae* (the oxalis invading our yards) is originally from South Africa – where, ironically, it is endangered, because native animals there eat it. Here, it is an exotic invasive, and it offers an interesting object lesson about herbicides: Folks using herbicides here have killed many weaker “weeds,”



including natives and desirable plants. This has left room in the ecosystem for the tougher invasives such as *oxalis pes-caprae* and Himalayan blackberry to spread with abandon.

In my yard, I accept a little oxalis popping up between cut-back perennials that haven't bushed out yet. But if I see it choking a “desirable” plant, I pull it out. If you keep pulling out the baby plants while the ground is wet in early spring, eventually the multitudinous bulblets (which remain after you pull out the plant and roots) will give up. (This is a great chore for kids, as the plants are easy to pull and not prickly.)

After you clear oxalis out, plant something else where it was. In my experience, if I am tending other plants, the oxalis only grows in between them. In other words, pack 'em in there! And if you can't, mulch.

Important: Don't rototill or move the soil around too much where oxalis is. This quickly spreads the bulblets.

Thanks for asking!

~ Rebecca Dwan

## Properly Disposing of Used Batteries

I wrote about this a couple of years ago, and I swear I do see a few less dead batteries lying in gutters and sidewalks around town! Thanks to all who are helping save our groundwater by picking these toxics up in your handy pocket “doggie” bag!

**Since dead batteries don't go in the trash, what do you do with them?**

■ **All batteries** can be brought to a Toxics Roundup or Facility. (See box, upper right.) With button batteries, it's safest to tape around each one so it won't connect with another battery and make a current.

■ In addition, when you're finished with **rechargeable batteries**, you can drop them for recycling at select stores, including Radio Shack, Bennett Valley Ace Hardware, Empire

Waste Management, Best Buy, Cingular Wireless, Home Depot, Sears, Target, and WalMart. Drop your batteries at Customer Service; if they don't know about the program, ask for the electronics department or a manager. Rechargeable batteries include those typically used in cordless phones, power tools, and laptops.

Also, when you buy rechargeable batteries, read the product usage information carefully. Some types work best if you use all their power before recharging, while some are the opposite, working best if you charge them more frequently.

For more about batteries, see our Nov/Dec 2001 issue (1/6), which is available online. One update since that article: At that time, officials said that it was okay to put alkaline batteries in the trash, but more research has determined that all batteries are toxics and need special handling.

~ Rebecca Dwan

### Household Toxics Roundup

The next Household Toxics Roundup is:

**Sat.–Sun., Aug. 14–15,**  
9 a.m.–3 p.m., Santa Rosa,  
County Civic Center, Admin-  
istration Dr. & Paulin Dr.

The new County Household Toxics Facility is hoping to open in late fall. For more information, call EcoDesk (see box below).

Note: Roundups are now only in Santa Rosa, because of volume. (That's the good and bad news!)

### The Resources of EcoDesk

EcoDesk offers all sorts of useful information about how to properly dispose of toxics. See their Recycling Guide in your Yellow Pages; their website at <[www.recycle.now.org](http://www.recycle.now.org)>; or call 565-3375.

The Sonoma County Waste Management Agency created EcoDesk, the Household Toxics Roundups, and the Toxics Facility to help keep toxics out of the dump and our shared environment. The Agency is funded by Sonoma County residents, through garbage fees and a surcharge on tipping fees at the dump.

### 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.

**Past issues of TNS** are at <[www.ci.sebastopol.ca.us](http://www.ci.sebastopol.ca.us)>; look under Programs. **An ongoing index by topic** is at <[www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html)>.

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