



# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Protecting Your Family From Toxic Pet Products

Are you unknowingly using pet care products that are hurting you, your children, and your pets?

About eight years ago, I was at an acquaintance's home and thought I smelled toxic pesticides. **When I asked, though, they were certain that they would never use pesticides.**

As we talked further, however, they mentioned that they'd just done a "flea dip" on their dogs. Looking at the package, I saw that the product's active ingredient was chlorpyrifos, a highly-neurotoxic pesticide. **They were using a toxic and didn't even know it!** This chemical is so toxic that, after years of reports about its harm, household uses were (finally!) restricted a few years ago.

Unfortunately, **consumers can still buy (or have at home) many toxic pet products**, including collars, sprays, shampoos, dips, and dusts. More than a billion dollars are spent each year on flea and tick products alone. Many of these items contain **neurotoxic pesticides**, including **organophosphates (OPs)** and **carbamates**. These chemicals kill insects by interfering with their nerve signal transmission. **Unfortunately, humans and other animals have similar neurological processes**, and thus can also be harmed by these materials, even in small amounts.



**Immediate effects** to humans and animals can include tremors, hyperactivity, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, even coma and death. **Long-term risks** include increased rates of asthma, cancer, and neurological disease; and harm to the endocrine (hormone) system.

**Children are especially vulnerable** because their systems are still developing, and they often crawl on the floor, touch pets, and touch their hands to their mouths. **Pets can also be harmed;** data suggests that hundreds, even thousands, have been injured by pet care products. (See TNS V/5 for more about the harm of OPs.)

**Remember: just because a product is for sale doesn't mean it's safe**, even when used as directed. The U.S. regulation system only requires that a product not cause "unreasonable" harm, and the assessment methods seriously underestimate that harm, including to children, pregnant women, and the ill and elderly. Even when there's substantial evidence of a product's harm, it can take years to get it off store shelves.

### The Solutions

Here are some ways you can help keep your family safe:

■ **Understand the risks of pet products you're using or considering.** Read labels carefully, and take warnings seriously. Especially avoid products with the keywords Danger or Warning. Also look on the label to



## It's Our Birthday!!

With this issue, we're celebrating *five years* publishing *The Next STEP (TNS)*! The goal of this innovative City project is to nurture a healthier Sebastopol for everyone. **To reduce exposure to toxics, we encourage voluntary reductions** in their use in all areas of our lives — including our homes, schools, businesses, parks, food, and water.

TNS is produced by a small team of local citizens, working on a volunteer basis (which keeps costs very low) because we support this goal! We're grateful to the City Council and staff for acting in the community's best interest with this project.

**Please fill out the enclosed survey card to give us your feedback about our efforts. Also let us know how we can best support your toxics reduction in the upcoming year**, including any questions, tips, story ideas, or success stories. Your support is what makes this project possible. Thank you!



"Thank you, this is fabulous info to have on hand!" *Kimberlee*

• • •

"Love the newsletter. Thank you!" *Sandi M.*

• • •

"Wow ... beautiful newsletter!" *wildflower*

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"Many thanks for all the good valuable work you do!" *Lenore F.*

identify the active ingredient(s); then look online for more about those chemicals' short-term and long-term risks. (See TNS V/4 for more about assessing pesticides.)

Protect, continued

■ **Phase out your use of toxic pet products.** Especially avoid chemicals in the OP and carbamate families, particularly around people or animals that are pregnant, young, ill, or elderly. Never allow children to apply OP or carbamate products to pets.

■ **Explore the many less-toxic alternatives.** (See below for ideas.)

■ **For emergency help with a pet or human poisoning,** call the California Emergency Poison Control Center at (800) 876-4766. **Also report the incident** to the EPA's National Pesticide Telecommunications Network at (800) 858-7378.

■ **Dispose of toxics properly.** For more information, see <[www.recycle-now.org](http://www.recycle-now.org)> or call (707) 565-3375.

■ **Encourage the removal of toxic pet products from store shelves.** The Natural Resources Defense Council suggests these actions:

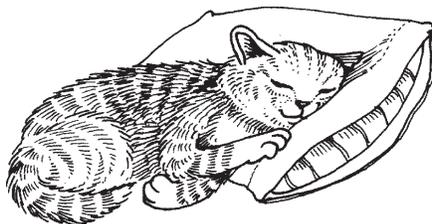
- Call on retailers to remove OP pet products from their shelves; and

- Call on the EPA to: immediately ban OP pet pesticides; consider banning carbamate pet products; and better inform veterinarians, pet owners, and the public about safer options for flea and tick control on pets.

Do you have a successful less-toxic pet remedy? Send it to us for possible inclusion in future issues.

~ Patricia Dines

SOURCES: *Natural Resources Defense Council* <[www.nrdc.org/health/effects/pets/execsum.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/health/effects/pets/execsum.asp)> • "Nontoxic Pest Control," *Co-op America*, June 2001.



## Less-Toxic Pest Control for Pets

■ **Physical measures.** Help control pests by bathing, brushing, and combing pets. Use a gentle flea shampoo without pesticides and a flea comb.

■ **Vinegar.** After bathing your pet, rinse with apple cider vinegar; fleas don't like the smell. (Test on a small area first; you might need to dilute it.) Or add a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar to your dog's water bowl.

■ **Essential oils.** Put a drop of essential oil on your pet's collar. Consider: Lavender (repels mosquitos, ticks, and fleas), peppermint (mosquitos), lemongrass (ticks), and citronella (fleas, dogs only), as well as lemon, cedar, eucalyptus, and neem. You can also rub eucalyptus oil or ground cloves into their fur. Moon Valley Collars offers a flea repellent essential oil blend. (<[www.moonvalleycollars.com](http://www.moonvalleycollars.com)>, (877) 4COLLAR).

■ **Lemon spritz.** To repel fleas, cut 6 lemons in half, boil in a quart of water, steep a few hours, then strain into a spray bottle. Spritz your pet's fur, avoiding the eyes, and brush.

■ **Protective nutrition.** A healthy pet is more able to repel bugs. Considering adding immunity boosters to meals, including brewer's yeast (1/2 teaspoon), grated garlic (dogs only, 1 clove per 30 pounds), safflower oil (1 tsp), or powdered seaweed (1 tsp). (Debra Lynn Dadd says that brewer's yeast also gives a pet's skin an odor that is unpleasant to fleas.)

■ **Carpet and furniture treatments.** Establish a regular pet sleeping area and wash pet bedding often. Vacuum regularly in areas that pets frequent. To deter fleas, flies, and ants, combine two cups natural diatomaceous earth (not the pool product) with one cup each of baking soda and cornstarch. Sprinkle on carpets and furniture, let sit for 1-2 hours, then vacuum. (Consider steam-cleaning beforehand.) Flea Busters also offers a low-toxicity home treatment using a boron-based salt. (<[www.flea-busters.com](http://www.flea-busters.com)>, (877) 323-2287).

■ **Yard care.** Mow often in areas that pets frequent. Consider beneficial nematodes, which are non-toxic and feed on flea larvae. (Available locally at Harmony Farm Supply.)

## Denmark Pesticide Phase-Out on State-Owned Property

Because of concerns voiced by citizens, **Denmark has decided to phase out the use of pesticides on state-owned property.** According to the article *Chemicals: A Danish Priority*, "County and local councils have entered into agreements with the State on phasing out the use of pesticides in such public areas as playing fields, parks, and forests. And all ministries have action plans for phasing out pesticides in state-owned areas — from state forests to cemeteries." A tax supports research into non-chemical alternatives to pesticides and encourages reduced pesticide use.

SOURCES: "Public action prompts Denmark decision," *Canary News*, Sept./Oct 2002, Page 7. • "Chemicals: A Danish Priority," <[www.mst.dk/chemi/01020000.htm](http://www.mst.dk/chemi/01020000.htm)>

**For more information and ideas see:** *Home Safe Home* (Debra Lynn Dadd); *Common-Sense Pest Control* (Olkowski, et al); <[www.paw-rescue.org/PAW/PETTIPS/DogTip\\_InsectPrevention.php](http://www.paw-rescue.org/PAW/PETTIPS/DogTip_InsectPrevention.php)>; and <[www.care2.com](http://www.care2.com)> (then do a search, for example "cat fleas"). You can also find natural products and books at natural food stores and online.

## 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.