



A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Calculating the Full Cost of Toxic Pesticides (Part II)

The vast majority of **Americans agree that we want clean air and water**, for the health of ourselves and families. Unfortunately, cumulative **toxic pollution takes away from us that shared basic right**.

However, **we can take back our power and help create a healthier world for all**. The first step is understanding what's rarely considered — how much toxics cost us all throughout their lifecycle. These costs occur during five key phases: 1) Production; 2) Transportation; 3) Application; 4) Storage & Disposal; and 5) Extraordinary Events. So let's continue now with our exploration of how this unnecessary harm happens.

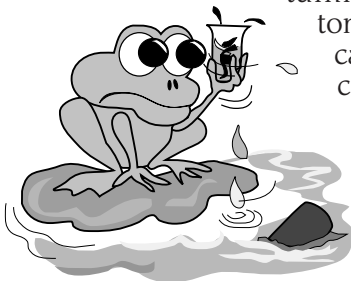
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4) Storage & Disposal

Costs: Harm to the health of people and ecosystems from leakage, especially near storage and disposal sites.

In 1978, blue-collar mother **Lois Gibbs** was trying to solve her two children's continuing illnesses. She was stunned to discover that her neighborhood was built next to **Love Canal** — a leaking dump site containing 20,000

tons of chemical waste, including DDT, lindane, PCBs, and heavy metals.



Talking to neighbors, she found disturbingly high rates of birth defects and other diseases. Her outrage spurred her to lead her community in taking actions that resulted in the government purchase of their site.¹

Sadly, Love Canal is not at all an isolated case. Across the country and around the globe, long-forgotten pesticides leach from abandoned manufacturing sites; compressed landfills; barrels dumped in developing countries with lax health and environmental controls — even corroding spray cans long forgotten in our backyard sheds. These poisons join the uncontrolled toxic brew now polluting us all through the air, water, dirt, and food that circulate the earth.

5) Extraordinary Events

Costs: Harm to the health of ecosystems and people (including residents and first responders) from the accidental release of everyday chemicals through accidents, fires, floods, hurricanes, and terrorism.

The stormwaters of 2005's **Hurricane Katrina** caused widespread dispersal of toxics when they swept through an area nicknamed "Cancer Alley" because of the many petroleum facilities, chemical plants, and hazardous waste sites there. Though this threatened people, pets, the environment, and the local fishing industry, the government's response was not to protect people but instead to lift environmental regulations and seek to reduce corporate liability.

Similarly, the **September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attacks**, and the ensuing fires, covered a densely populated area with thou-

See Full Cost, over ...

Creating Healthier, Happier Holidays for All

Each year, it's easy to be swept up into the "buy-more, waste-more" holiday madness. But the cost of this is high — not only to our pocketbooks and sanity — but also to our precious earth.

You can create a healthier, happier holiday season for all. Here are some ideas to get you started:

■ **Decorate with nature.** Bring nature inside to help create the holiday mood, save money, and reduce toxic manufacturing and waste. How does your backyard inspire your creativity? Share time with friends and family in exploring nature's art. With branches of bright red maple leaves, dried Queen Anne's Lace, pine cones and boughs, logs, and colorful squash and fruits, you can make attractive seasonal centerpieces, front door wreaths, and mantel-piece decor. String your holiday tree with popcorn and cranberries. After the festivities, offer what's left to the birds and the compost pile.

■ **Use natural scents.** Instead of using commercial scents with hidden mystery ingredients (often including toxic petroleum-based chemicals), freshen your house with natural scents. Bring in bunches of fresh flowers; use essential oils, diluted in a spray bottle or on a lightbulb ring; simmer herbs in a pot of water; or throw herbs like cinnamon into your fireplace. Much better! (More about toxic scents is in TNS IV/6.)

■ **Give less-toxic gifts.** Choose organic foods and clothing, toys made from natural materials, and books that educate people about creating a healthier home and world. (One good choice is *The Green Kitchen Handbook*, by Annie Berthold-Bond.)

■ **Offer experiences not products.** Easy gifts that mean a lot and nurture your relationships can include: a coupon for an afternoon babysitting, a day helping clean out the garage, a pre-paid class registration, cookie-

See Holidays, over ...

Full Cost, continued

sands of tons of acrid dust, including everyday toxics like lead, mercury, dioxin, and PCBs. Responders and site workers received false assurances instead of safety gear; thousands still suffer (often debilitating) illnesses. Toxic dust still permeates area homes, schools, and offices.²

In 2005, a variety of experts warned Congress that the U.S. was **vulnerable to terrorist attacks on chemical plants**. According to the EPA, there are 123 chemical plants in 24 states where a toxics release could threaten over one million people. Some are calling for tighter security at plants and better preparedness for an attack aftermath.³ But others see this as just more of the enormous and unnecessary risks (and costs) that toxics bring to us all.

Adding Up the Costs

Only by seeing the full lifecycle costs of pesticides can we truly understand **the high price that we all pay for their use, in so many ways** — through health insurance premiums, taxes for regulation and cleanup, family and friends suffering

Holidays, continued

making lessons, a massage gift certificate, theater tickets, or a night out on the town.

■ **Wrap ecologically.** If you use wrapping paper, choose recycled and chlorine-free. Avoid metal wraps that can't be recycled. Or get creative and cover packages with magazines, comics, sports pages, old maps, fabric, even brown paper bags stamped with pretty images and tied with raffia. Decorate packages or paper bags with leaves, twigs, and flowers.

These are just some ideas, to get you started. Use your own creativity to truly make this a season of love for all. For more ideas, see <www.healthyworld.org/eco_holidays.html> and <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html>. Please email us with your own handy tips, for future articles.

from illness and death, lost labor and wisdom in our workforce, farms and ecosystems failing to offer us food and livelihood, diminished species diversity, and a sense of dread at how many are falling ill.

A conservative Cornell University study found that just some of these indirect impacts **cost the U.S. \$8 billion a year**.⁴ The World Health Organization estimates that **five million people worldwide are acutely poisoned by pesticides each year**. This doesn't include the chronic diseases pesticides cause.

Perhaps if pesticides' full costs were reflected in their retail prices, users would bear more of these costs instead of shifting them to others. It might lead more of them to discover the many wonderful less-toxic alternatives, which are better for our health *and* our wallets. Still, money can never fully compensate victims for the loss of their health, loved ones, or functioning ecosystems.

Isn't the Government Protecting Us?

So why then does our culture continue using so many of these toxics? Perhaps because many people believe (or hope) that if it's for sale, it must be safe, that the government is protecting us. Sadly, though, study after study has revealed that, while better than nothing, government pesticide regulation is allowing a great deal of harm to occur unabated.

So do we just need better government control? Unfortunately, while

sometimes a helpful interim measure, this just adds to the high costs we're already paying for toxics.

The truth is that **it's impossible to control all the impacts from regularly distributing large quantities of toxic materials** in our world and lives. The hyper-control model has failed to protect us.

What We Can Do

So it comes down to us, consumers and citizens, to say what costs we're willing to bear — and ask others to bear in our name. Personally, when I saw the total harm of these toxics, I felt that the costs were simply unacceptable — and, luckily, unnecessary. Rather than trying to predict, measure, and clean up after so many tons of poisons, a much simpler and cheaper approach is just not to use them in the first place. That is why I do the work that I do.

We can all help reduce this harm by asking three questions:

- 1) How can I reduce the toxicity of the pesticide products I use?
- 2) How can I reduce the toxics used in, and to make, the products I buy (including food)?
- 3) How can I encourage government and community action to reduce toxics use and harm?

By these actions, step by step, we all can truly change the world.

~ Patricia Dines

For specific actions you can do, see past TNS issues at <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html>.

Footnotes are on the City website's STEP page.

**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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Disposing of Toxics Locally

Sonoma County's **Community Toxics Collection** will be in Sebastopol 11/14/06 and 1/23/07, by appointment. More information about this — and about Sonoma County's **Household Toxics Facility** — is at <www.recyclenow.org> or call 565-3375 (DESK).