



# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Taming Our Tiny Friends

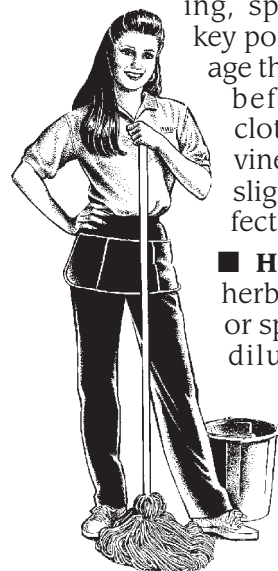
With the winter rains come ant invasions, as these tiny teams join our warm refuge from the weather and find feasts in the crumbs and dribbles that we don't even notice.

In general, the simplest solution is to follow the ant trail until you find out what's attracting them. Remove that by cleaning it up, sealing it up, or putting it in the fridge. With a soapy sponge, wipe the trail back to the entry point. Seal that with a little caulk or toothpaste. Then just keep the whole area "boring" to them (i.e. very clean with no food out).

This approach usually does the trick and is the easiest, cheapest, and safest. More information is in prior issues; see <[www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html)> under "Ants."

Here are some other less-toxic approaches you can try:

■ **Vinegar.** Clean the ant trail with vinegar on a sponge. Or, after cleaning, spray vinegar at key points to discourage their return. (Test before spraying cloth and carpets; vinegar can have a slight bleaching effect.)



■ **Herbs.** Scatter herbs in key areas, or spray herb tea or diluted essential oils. Recommended options include bay laurel,

### What Is Boric Acid?

Boric acid is an odorless inorganic white powder, derived from water and boron (an element). It's in products to control ants, ticks, fleas, cockroaches, silverfish, slugs, termites, and more. It's also used as a wood preservative and fire retardant.

Boric acid has a very low toxicity to humans and other mammals. However, it can be an irritant, so keep it away from food, children, and pets. Also, if you use the powder form, wear a dust mask, gloves, and eye protection.

rosemary, peppermint, spearmint, catnip, sage, and tansy.

■ **Spices.** Scatter cinnamon, nutmeg, chili pepper, or salt in key spots.

What can you do if these approaches don't work and the problem is still serious? The next step in an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach is a least-toxic pesticide. (See TNS II/6 for more about the systematic IPM process.) So, if you want to kick it up a notch, try these products in the ants' path.

■ **Orange Guard.** The active ingredient in this water-based insecticide is d-Limonene, a steam-distilled by-product of citrus peels. All its ingredients are FDA food-grade and GRAS (Generally Recognized As Safe). The broad-based product also kills aphids, mealybugs, gnats, silverfish, roaches, and fleas. Tests show that the product has no significant toxicity to humans, though it might irritate eyes or skin upon contact.



## It's Our Birthday!!

With this issue, we're celebrating *six 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!



"I read your newsletter each time. It has lots of useful information that I didn't know, and puts the thinking in the right direction."

...

"The STEP newsletter is great!"

Orange Guard is at stores or see <[www.orange-guard.com](http://www.orange-guard.com)>.

■ **Boric acid baits** are the most targeted low-toxic way to stop ants at their nests. Most products are boric acid (see box above) plus a sweetener to attract the ants. You drop the product onto cardboard squares and place them where the ants are. Because

See *Ants*, over

## The World View

### Toxics Outlawed Elsewhere Are Allowed in U.S.

American consumers are unknowingly buying wood, toys, electronics, pesticides, and cosmetics containing toxic substances banned or restricted elsewhere (especially Europe and Japan) because they increase the risk of cancer, alter hormones, or cause reproductive or neurological damage.

For example, plywood destined for American cabinets and furniture often contains formaldehyde, a chemical banned in many countries and shown to cause nose and throat cancer, allergic reactions, asthma attacks, headaches, and sore throats.

The California Air Resources Board estimates that one of every 10,000 Californians is at risk of contracting cancer from breathing average formaldehyde levels found in homes and offices.

"I'll guarantee you that no one tells a customer building a \$75,000 kitchen that their cabinets contain plywood from China that will off-gas formaldehyde," said Larry Percivalle of EarthSource Forest Products.

In the absence of federal action on these toxics, California might step in. The Air Resources Board is considering standards roughly equivalent to Europe's for 2008 and Japan's for 2010 through 2012.

*SOURCE: "U.S. Rules Allow the Sale of Products Others Ban," L.A. Times, by Marla Cone, Times Staff Writer, Oct. 8, 2006 <[www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-me-dumping8oct08,1,3353051.story?coll=la-headlines-frontpage](http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-me-dumping8oct08,1,3353051.story?coll=la-headlines-frontpage)>*

### Europe Passes Stronger Toxic Controls

After seven years of review and contentious debate, the European Parliament has just passed the world's strongest law protecting people and the environment from thousands of toxic chemicals. It's expected that this historic legislation will have a far-reaching effect on industries and products worldwide,



including in the U.S. The European Union already has banned many chemicals that remain legal in the U.S., including phthalates in toys and cosmetics, high formaldehyde levels in wood, and lead in electronics.

The new law (called REACH or Registration, Evaluation, and Authorization of Chemicals) regulates about 30,000 toxic substances, including compounds used in electronics, furniture, toys, cosmetics, and other everyday items. The most hazardous (an estimated 1,500) could be banned or restricted.

Although adamantly opposed by U.S. industry and the Bush administration, the legislation was not as strong as some Europeans had sought. Still, Parliament member Avril Doyle of Ireland called it a "hard-won compromise" that "will have a very positive influence on standards worldwide."

The legislation, to be phased in over 11 years, requires industries to register chemicals, submit health and safety data, and replace the most hazardous ones with safer alternatives. The European Commission says there is little existing safety information on 99% of the tens of thousands of chemicals put on the market before 1981.

The new law will also replace 40 European Union rules with a comprehensive program and a new central regulatory authority, the European Chemicals Agency.

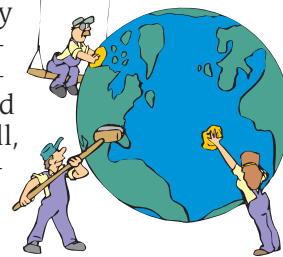
European Parliament President Josep Borrell of Spain said the legislation "offers EU citizens true protection against the multitude of toxic substances in everyday life."

"When one in three people contract cancer in their lifetime, we need to stop using known and suspected cancer-causing chemicals in commerce. The same goes for chemicals that are now accumulating in our children's bodies," said Bev Thorpe,

Director of Clean Production Action, an international group advocating green chemistry.

The U.S. chemical industry battled the proposal for years,

calling it costly and bureaucratic. Nevertheless, said Steven Russell, Senior Director of the American Chemistry Council, "the U.S. chemical industry is going to focus quickly and smartly on getting the job done. Our customers need our products and we have a strong motivation to continue to supply them."



**What can you do?** Encourage state and federal legislators to follow the lead of Europe and Japan in protecting people and the environment from common toxics. Also, choose less-toxic products made by companies seeking to reduce our individual and shared toxic load.

*SOURCE: "Europe passes tough chemical law," L.A. Times, by Marla Cone, Times Staff Writer, Dec. 14, 2006 <[www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-fg-chemicals14dec14,1,6782734.story](http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-fg-chemicals14dec14,1,6782734.story)>*

### Ants, continued

this poisons the ants' nest, use only if other methods aren't successful. Also keep baits out of reach of curious pets and children.

And, while protecting your turf, remember that the 10,000 species of ants around the globe are an essential part of nature's functioning. Plus these social insects can lift 50 times their own weight! How cool is that?

~ 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.

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Printed on recycled paper.