

THE NEXT S T E P

Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Thank You For Your Feedback!

Thank you to the 216 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 that you find The Next STEP (TNS) newsletter helpful and interesting.** Your comments included: "TNS has helped my awareness," "I very much appreciate your efforts," "You're doing great!", "Keep up the good work!", and "Keep it coming!"

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **47% said you use pesticides at home or work. Of these, 39% use only natural pesticides,** 27% use synthetic, and 34% use both.

■ We were delighted that **84% of you said that this newsletter has helped you reduce your use of toxics** (a big leap up from last year's 72%). That really makes our work feel worthwhile. It was valuable to

hear the examples of what you found useful. Readers said, for instance, that you now use vinegar for cleaning, have stopped using lawn chemicals and bleach, and

avoid buying pressure-treated wood. You said that you appreciated the information on perfumes and lawn toxics "that hurt children and animals"; the alternatives for house-cleaning, ants, mold, snails, and weeds in cement; and the "new ideas to replace harsh cleaning products."

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 our 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.

Also, 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 \$100 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.



Mouse Ousters

A couple readers asked for safe ways to rid their homes of mice.

Mice can indeed be a problem, damaging food, clothing, documents, electrical wires, and structures. They're also considered a possible vector for disease.

However rodent toxics, including arsenic and strychnine, are some of the most harmful used in homes, especially risking the health of children and pets. Additionally, poisoned mice can die behind walls (making an awful and unreachable smell) or outside (where they can kill the hawks, owls, and wild mammals which eat them). Thousands of wildlife deaths annually are likely caused this way — killing the animals that control rodents naturally.

Luckily, there are effective alternative solutions. One fun option is to keep "mouser" cats around and slightly hungry, so they hunt for food. Another easy option is using HaveAHart mousetraps to catch mice alive for later release (perhaps in some lovely local park). I tried this once, and, after catching a few (very cute) mice, had no more problems. Usually a bait of peanut butter or oats will do the trick.

Other approaches you can try include storing food in secure containers (especially grains), and finding and blocking holes rodents can use for entry. You can either do the latter yourself or call a professional to "rodent-proof" your home. Look for one committed to avoiding poisons, or at least tell them that you want to see what first can be accomplished without toxics.

SOURCES: *Common Sense Pest Control*, by William Olkowski, et al • *Home Safe Home*, by Debra Lynn Dadd

Ask the Expert

One reader asks, "Could you have a 'Questions' section where we can ask the expert?" We think that's a great idea. So email your questions to <STEP@healthyworld.org> and perhaps you'll find your answer in an upcoming issue!

New York City No Spray Victory

For seven years, New York City residents and groups have been suing to stop the City's "massive and indiscriminate spraying of toxic pesticides, including malathion," against mosquitoes. The City has repeatedly claimed that the chemicals used were completely safe.

Finally, on April 12, a federal judge accepted a settlement agreement in which New York City admits what the science has said all along — that the pesticides it used can indeed harm human health and the environment, kill pests' natural predators, increase pests' resistance to sprays, and persist in the environment. They're also not approved for use in waterways.

The No Spray Coalition, a lead plaintiff, called the agreement "a tremendous victory for health advo-

cates" and the thousands of New Yorkers made seriously ill by the spraying—including those who died from pesticide-related illnesses and those suffering from asthma and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS). They also expect the agreement's terms to help people fighting pesticide spraying elsewhere.

According to the agreement, the City will make payments to five grassroots environmental and wildlife rehabilitation groups, and will meet with the plaintiffs to address their concerns. One of the Coalition's proposed remedies is the creation of a Community Health and Environment Council, to assess the impacts of proposed toxics, review and propose alternatives, and sponsor public meetings before pesticides are used. The Coalition hopes that the City will be "accountable environmentally and health-wise to the people subjected to these toxins."

This story shows the importance of recognizing the harm of these common toxics before using them, instead of afterwards, when the harm is worse and difficult or impossible to undo. It also shows the vital role that activists play in fighting for everyone's well-being, often at a sacrifice to themselves, with little or no funding, and against great odds.

For more about this settlement and toxics, see <www.nospray.org>. For more about responsible mosquito control, see <www.beyondpesticides.org/mosquito/activist> and the STEP Online Index.

Quick Clicks

Want a quick answer for your specific question about a toxic or alternative? Our STEP Online Index can help you find what you seek. Just go to <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html>, look up your topic, and click on the links to download the related past STEP issues.

Topics that readers asked about in the survey which can be found in the Index (by keyword) include: "Natural remedies for *snails* and *earwigs*," "Information on *mold* and effective treatment of," "Information on *ants*," "What to use instead of *Roundup*," "What to do with old batteries," and "Free disposal at County dump."

Poisoned Pet Food

As we go to press, millions of worried pet owners across the U.S. are still waiting for definitive information about the poisoned pet foods that have caused hundreds, even thousands, of pet injuries and deaths.

Already we've seen the largest pet food recall ever, involving more than 60 million cat and dog food containers and surely thousands of tons of food. Most products were made by Menu Foods and sold under a wide range of names, including major well-known brands and store brands.

Right now, the problem is considered to be the wheat gluten ingredient, which has been found to have rat poison and melamine (used in making plastics, glues, fertilizers, and more). Melamine has now also been found in rice proteins, leading to new recalls and increased concerns, including about possible contamination of human food.

Questions also remain about why Menu Foods

took three weeks after receiving complaints to notify the FDA, and about the sale by Menu Foods' CFO of half his company holdings before the news was released.

Pet owners can get information online about pet food products, how to report problems, and more, at sites such as <www.dogaware.com>.

In addition, all U.S. consumers should insist that the reasons for this poisoning be determined and remedies implemented — not only for this direct problem, but also the larger ones reflected in the story — insufficient government regulation of food safety, including between countries; the regular inclusion of sub-standard and toxic ingredients in both pet and human foods; and the many ways that everyday toxics harm all life on this precious planet.

SOURCES: "Largest Pet Food Recall Ever," by Dr. Michael W. Fox, author of the *Animal Doctor* column <<http://tedeboy.tripod.com/drmichaelwfox/id74.html>> •

"China Denies Role in U.S. Pet Deaths," by Alexa Olesen, AP, April 6, 2007 <www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2007/04/06/ap3589329.html>



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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