

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Gift of Healthier Holidays for All

This holiday season, give yourself and others the gift of a healthier, less-toxic home and world.

Here are some ideas for how you can do this.

(For more juicy details on these topics, see the [TNS Online Index](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEP/OnlineIndex.html) at <www.healthyworld.org/STEP/OnlineIndex.html>.)

■ **Decorate with nature's beauty.** Instead of spending money on imported toxic trinkets, bring the outside in with fallen pine boughs, bright red berries and leaves, and colorful squash and fruit.

■ **Avoid toxic "spray snow,"** which can include harmful chemicals like perchloroethylene and acetone. Try hanging homemade paper snowflake cutouts instead!

■ **Buy local organic food** for holiday meals and gifts. You'll enjoy and share delicious treats while supporting local healthier agriculture.

■ **Replace synthetic food dyes** with healthier natural ones.

■ **Clean your house less-toxically**, including the oven. For more details, see the [Online Index](#) under *Cleaners*.

■ **Fill your house with natural scents, instead of the toxics hidden in many commercial air fresheners.** Use natural essential oils, diluted in water in a spray bottle;

simmer herbs in water on the stove; or throw herbs like cinammon into your fireplace. More information is in the [Index](#) under *Perfumes*.

■ **Remove mold and reduce its regrowth** with less-toxic solutions, such as diluted tea tree oil. For more information, see the [Index](#) under *Mold & Mildew*.

■ **Manage ants without toxics.** For tips, see the [Index](#) under *Ants*.

■ **Give earth-friendly gifts**, including organic clothes, natural toys, and educational books, to make it easier for your loved ones to create healthier lives.

■ **Wrap ecologically.** Choose recycled and chlorine-free paper. Avoid metallic papers as they can't be recycled. You can also get creative and cover gifts with magazine images, comics, fabric, or paper bags stamped and tied with raffia.

■ **Reuse or recycle wrapping paper.** Don't burn it, as it can contain toxic metals.

■ **Discard outdated techno-toys responsibly**, including computers, TVs, phones, stereo equipment, etc. See the [Index](#) under *Electronic Waste*.

■ **Cut blackberries back during winter's dormancy.** Then, instead of pouring a toxic pesticide into their roots, prevent regrowth with vinegar. See the [Index](#) under *Vinegar*.

For more eco-holiday ideas, see <www.healthyworld.org/eco_holidays.html>. I'd also love to hear your tips and ideas. Email them to me at <STEP@healthyworld.org>.

~ Patricia Dines

California Bans Chemical in Plastic Baby Toys

California has just become the first state in the nation to ban the sale of toys for children under three that contain certain toxic plastic softeners called phthalates (pronounced "THA laytes"; the "ph" is silent).

Supported by environmental and health groups, this new law goes into effect Jan. 1, 2009. Similar legislation is expected soon in at least nine other states, and is being explored at the federal level.

Phthalates are used in a wide variety of consumer products, including plastic toys and baby teethingers. However, researchers say that regular contact with phthalates — for instance, chewing on plastic toys — can interfere with children's essential hormone systems at crucial stages in their development, increasing their chances of serious illness both now and later in life.

Animal studies have found that phthalates can cause significant reproductive and developmental harm, including early onset puberty, decreased female fertility, reduced offspring survival, increased birth defects, male genital abnormalities, breast and prostate cancer, and altered functioning of the thyroid gland.

Because of these problems, phthalates have been banned in children's toys in 14 nations and the European Union. Alternative materials are being used instead. For example, McDonald's makes toys for its meal packages that meet Europe's standards. Industry groups continue to maintain that phthalates are safe.

The California bill's author, San Francisco Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, said, "California continues to lead the nation in protecting children from dangerous chemicals and in safeguarding our environment. AB 1108 sends a clear message to the Consumer Product Safety Commission that if the Bush administration won't act, states will."

See TOYS, over



Greening Chemistry

I just returned from my annual pilgrimage to the Bioneers conference, held every October in Marin. As usual, I come back to my daily life invigorated both by the valuable information and ideas, and by the connection with others who also care about the earth.

One of the plenary speakers this year was Paul Anastas, who conference founder Kenny Ausubel in his introduction called “the father of green chemistry” because of his pioneering work in the field.

Green chemistry (GC) is the environmentally-friendly design of chemical products and processes to reduce or eliminate the use and production of hazardous substances.

GC, says Ausubel, benefits a corporation’s bottom line by creating superior products, trimming toxic waste, reducing liability, and avoiding harm to people and the planet.

Both Ausubel and Anastas described the devastation toxics cause today, including toxic spills, worsening ocean dead zones, chemical plants vulnerable to terrorist attacks that could harm millions, and a wide range of poisons found in everyone’s bodies, including newborns.

Anastas describes our current primary response to these threats as “hardening the perimeter” with guns, guards, and personal protective gear. He considers this approach flawed, both because these systems are imperfect and will fail, causing great harm (as in Bhopal), and because the costs are high but don’t add to product capabilities or company profits.

GC offers a better way to address these problems — by designing our chemicals wisely from the start, so that they’re less-toxic, biodegradable, safe for people and wildlife, and less vulnerable to accidents and terrorists.

Anastas says that it’s a myth that we can’t have our modern conveniences without poisoning ourselves. GC applications are al-



ready succeeding in a wide variety of sectors. They’re also essential to solving many of our current sustainability challenges, he says, including global warming, energy production and efficiency, and a healthy food supply.

GC is becoming increasingly adopted and appreciated, with GC organizations, university programs, and awards springing up around the world. Europe is pioneering the implementation of these ideas in law. California is now finalizing its plans to adopt GC. (For more on the latter, see the [Index](#) under *Green Chemistry*.) GC work was even recognized in the 2005 Nobel Prize for Chemistry, as the Committee called the awarded work “a great step forward for ‘green chemistry’ ... an example of how important basic science has been applied for the benefit of man, society, and the environment.”

To assist implementation of GC ideas, Anastas with John C. Warner developed 12 principles of green chemistry. He says that these might seem like common sense, but unfortunately aren’t yet common. Overall, these encourage scientists to:

- Design processes to maximize the amount of the raw material that ends up in the final product;
- Design chemicals and products to degrade to innocuous substances after use, avoiding accumulation in the environment;
- Design energy-efficient processes;
- Design to minimize potential for accidental release, fires, and explosions;
- Avoid producing toxic products and waste;
- Use safe, environmentally-benign substances, including solvents, whenever possible;
- Use renewable feedstocks and reusable catalysts; and
- Use real-time monitoring.

That sounds like smart chemistry to me!

~ Patricia Dines

RESOURCES: *Bioneers Conference* <www.bioneers.org>, *Wikipedia* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_chemistry>

TOYS, continued

While this bill is an important and valuable step forward, it’s just a first step. Unfortunately, these chemicals are still used in many other toys and products, and are found to be widely polluting our bodies and our world. For more about the problems with phthalates, and how you can protect yourself and the planet, see this article’s resources at <www.healthyworld.org/catoys.html>.

SOURCE: “A nationwide toxic toy ban likely to follow state lead,” *SF Chronicle*, Tom Chorneau, Oct. 16, 2007 <www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/10/16/MNTOSQDJV.DTL>

“It’s a dangerous myth to believe that you can make yourself into a healthy person on a sick planet.

You can eat wild salmon instead of tuna to reduce your exposure to PCBs and mercury. You can exercise and reduce your risk of heart disease and hypertension. But we can’t shop our way or lifestyle our way out of being connected to everything else on our planet.”

Charlotte Brody
Health Care Without Harm
Executive Director, *Commonweal*

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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