



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Invisible Trespass

In the spring a young man's thoughts turn to ... pesticides? Yes, to some folks, springtime means that it's time to use toxics to manage their yards, roadways, sports fields, farms, and more.

Unfortunately, these materials usually don't stay just on that user's land, despite laws that they should. Instead, pesticides have been found to travel up to hundreds of miles from their original application site. As pesticide educator Marion Moses once said, "Pesticides obey the laws of physics, not the laws of the state of California."

As a result, other people, animals, and ecosystems can be exposed to toxics known to cause acute and long-term harm. In fact, it was health effects years ago from a neighboring orchard's pesticide drift that led me to learn about the serious dangers of toxics and the vital need to change our methods.

The two main ways that pesticides move from their original site are through the air (during and after application) and through water (from rain and irrigation). Also, the sun's heat can make pesticides on surfaces airborne and mobile again. When I first learned that latter fact, I thought, "Aha! That's why I smelled pesticides and felt ill on days when they hadn't sprayed."

What Can You Do?

■ **If a pesticide exposure makes you sick** enough to require emergency medical care, handle that first.

California Poison Control (800) 876-4766 is staffed with medical professionals knowledgeable about pesticide exposure specifics. (Most doctors don't get this training.)

■ **If you observe pesticides drifting onto you**, your house, or car, this is illegal. Especially if the application is being done by a farmer or other professional applicator, report it right away to the Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner's office (565-2371). Ask them to swab test any spots where you saw the drift land.

It's vital that we report these incidents and encourage others to do so. Most folks don't know the procedure, but this is one of the few times we can directly say "no" to pesticides' imposition. Plus the system depends on our reports to help protect people and our environment from toxics.

■ **If you go to a doctor** after exposure, find one trained in pesticide diagnosis or insist that they explore that option. Also ask that they report your experience to the county health officer. Most doctors don't know that they're to do this, resulting in statistics that underestimate the problem.

■ **Use any pesticides responsibly**, following label directions to reduce movement in air and water.

■ **Support groups working for systemic prevention of drift.** The wonderful Pesticide Action Network <www.panna.org> is acting to phase out the most drift-prone pesticides, support access to non-toxic alternatives, and improve drift policy.

Is It Allergies – Or Toxics?

Along with flowers blossoming, one of the surest signs of spring around here is the sniffing that many people attribute to allergies.

However, few folks know that their symptoms might have another cause: the pesticide sprays that also emerge in spring. After all, these toxics can produce symptoms similar to allergies and colds, including a runny nose, scratchy throat, watery eyes, sneezing, coughing, and headaches.

Other pesticide exposure symptoms can include nausea, dizziness, sweating, muscle-twitching, cardiac arrhythmias, stupor, seizures, mood disturbances (such as confusion, excitement, mania, and depression), and much more.

Why does it matter if toxics are causing your health symptoms? Because an accurate diagnosis is vital for a proper cure. Also, toxic exposures today increase your risk of less-visible chronic diseases, such as cancer and breakdowns of the neurological, immune, and reproductive systems.

However, there are three key challenges to identifying a correlation: (1) We're exposed to toxics in many areas of our life, but they're invisible so it's hard to know when they're present; (2) Most doctors aren't trained to consider and identify pesticide-related illnesses; and (3) Assessment is usually low-tech, based on patient symptoms and exposure reports.

What Can You Do?

■ **Observe when you do (and don't) have your allergy or other symptoms**, to see if they occur during or after your time at a certain location.

See Health, over

■ **Nurture local organic farms.** We don't have to decide between local and organic food. Choose both!

■ **Learn more** about drift science, laws, and useful actions you can take at <www.panna.org/drift>.

~ Patricia Dines

Seasonal Solutions

The STEP Online Index helps you live less-toxically by linking you to our past articles on toxics and alternatives. Just look at <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html> and either browse or search for your area of interest. Here is a sampling of a few timely topics you'll find there.

Creating Your Spring Garden

Now is a good time to get started on your garden, because the still-moist ground makes weeding, tilling, and fertilizing so much easier. Then you'll be ready for the fun of choosing plants that work well for your spot and planting them (once the frost danger has passed). In TNS VII/2, we describe these easy steps for creating a vibrant garden from the start, thus increasing the health of your garden goodies while reducing pest problems. And if you have snails and slugs trying to join your feast, avoid baits that include toxic metaldehyde and instead use the slug management tips in TNS VI/2.

Nurturing a Truly Healthy Lawn

Contrary to their bucolic image, lawns can have more pesticides applied per acre than farms. Do we really want our children and pets playing in that? To find out more about the risks and options, see TNS IV/3. It shows how you can get your lawn off to a good start!



Non-Toxic Spring Cleaning

It seems almost built into our biology (for some of us anyway) that the warming weather brings with it the urge to clear our homes of the cobwebs of winter.

Unfortunately, if we clean with many common household products, we might also be bringing unnecessarily harmful toxics into our homes. Learn more about the risks and alternatives in TNS II/1. To identify what's in your current cleaning products (if the ingredients aren't on the label), look at <www.HouseholdProducts.nlm.nih.gov>. For more about this, see TNS VI/4.

Thankfully, less-toxic cleaning works great. For most categories, you can find a natural alternative at the health food store. (Read labels carefully to avoid greenwashing.) Or use simple (and cheap!) ingredients to make your own. For instance, much can be done with the very helpful vinegar; find out more in TNS II/2. And explore the glories of borax in TNS II/4. If mildew and mold are your challenge, see TNS II/3, III/6, and IV/1 for effective options to bleach. Learn how to clean your oven less-toxically in TNS V/1, and your bathroom porcelain in TNS VII/2.

For helpful books with even more cleaning tips (as well as stats about the harm that toxic cleaners can do), see TNS VI/3.

And if your spring cleaning results in a pile of unneeded items, be sure to donate and recycle what

Removing Teacup Stains

A while back a reader asked how to remove stains in teacups without using toxic bleach.

Luckily, this is easy! Just put vinegar on the scrubber side of a sponge and it should come off pretty quickly. This is because vinegar has a slight bleaching effect. For a little more power, add Bon Ami non-chlorine powder. Rinse well. Ta-da! (And thanks for asking. Now my two previously-stained cups are sparkling again!)

you can, and dispose of toxics safely. For more information, see <www.recyclenow.org> or call 565-3375.

Natural Scents for Your Home

Despite their ads' natural images, the scents in air fresheners, perfumes, and many other products often come not from plants but petroleum, putting at risk the health of anyone who breathes them. But the labels are silent about these risks! Find out more about the issues and options in TNS IV/6. Plus see TNS VII/2 (for healthy air fresheners) and TNS V/5 (for air-cleansing plants).

And, if you want to bring a little fun into your cleaning (no, really!), add natural essential oils to your homemade cleaning products. Then, after you're done, you'll find your home filled with scents like lavender, lemon, and mint. For more ideas and information, see TNS IV/1.

Health, continued

■ **If you find a correlation**, explore possible toxic sources at that site, including pesticides and toxic building materials and furnishings.

■ **To learn more about the health effects of specific pesticides**, get *Recognition and Management of Pesticide Poisonings* free from the Environmental Protection Agency. Call (800) 490-9198 and request EPA735R98003. Or download it at <www.epa.gov/pesticides/safety>.

■ **Support your health by reducing your toxic exposures.** Start

with those you've identified as possible triggers. Then reduce your overall load, to increase your body's ability to handle unavoidable toxics and allergens. Replace toxic products in your home. Buy organic food, which has been shown to notably reduce toxics in our bodies. Encourage toxics reduction at places you frequent, such as work and school.

Our health is precious, underlying everything we do. Help protect it from these unwanted toxic invaders.

~ 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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