



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

When Is a Recall Not a Recall?

Unfortunately, that title is not a clever Zen koan, but **the current state of product regulation at our federal Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).**

A *New York Times* article last fall described **the case of Walter E. Friedel, who waterproofed his tile floors with a do-it-yourself product**, Stand 'n Seal, in what he thought would be a quick weekend project. The label said that any extra spray would "evaporate harmlessly." The store display showed a customer using the product with a closed window and no mask.

However, when Mr. Friedel used the product, his lungs became so chemically inflamed that he was rushed to the hospital and spent four days in intensive care, gasping for air. It then took him months to slowly heal his lungs, taking oxygen-tank breaks at work. He still undergoes pulmonary function tests nearly three years later.

Sadly, he was not the first victim of this product, which the CPSC, the manufacturer, and retailers knew was a problem at the time. At least 80 people had already been sickened using it, two of them fatally, and many with similar stories. Still, no one had removed the product from shelves, and the manufacturer tried to

cover up the situation, even telling staff on their emergency phone line not to reveal that other customers were having similar complaints.

Federal law requires manufacturers to notify the CPSC within 24 hours after determining that a product defect might present a health hazard. However, it took the manufacturer several weeks to report problems, and only after a physician threatened to call the CPSC directly. Then the manufacturer tried to downplay the problem as just one of a "chemically pungent" smell. It took another three months for the CPSC to issue a recall and then they simply took the company's word that the problem had been fixed. It hadn't. The updated product still had the same ingredient, just a stronger scent to warn users.

All in all, the product stayed on shelves for over a year after the 2005 recall and it took another six months to remove the ingredient from the "updated" product. At the time of the *New York Times* article, two years after the problem came to light, not even fines had been issued against the manufacturer.

Nancy A. Nord, the CPSC's Acting Chair, said the agency is proud of its record of getting hazardous products off the market. **But the Stand 'n Seal case is a powerful illustration of the CPSC's failure to live up to its mission.**

"They did not get the job done that consumers expect, and people suffered as a result," said R. David

See Recall, over



Timely Detoxifiers

Guard Against Mosquitoes Without Toxics

With summer comes mosquitoes — and bug sprays! Though DEET-based insecticides are often touted, they carry serious warnings about health risks. There are effective less-toxic alternatives! To learn more about this and other ways to avoid mosquito problems, see TNS VI/4. (Look at our [Online Index](#), under *Mosquitoes*, at <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html>.)

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Protect Your Teenagers At Work

Is your teenager working this summer for extra cash? Make sure they're safe from worksite toxics. Even if protective equipment is available, most teens are unaware of its importance for immediate and long-term health. For more about toxics often used in business, actions you can take, and symptoms to watch for, see TNS V/4 (in our [Index](#) under *Teenagers*).

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Keep Toxics Out of Our Water

Many summer activities can inadvertently put toxics into our shared water supply and environment. You can help prevent that!

For instance, tips for choosing and disposing of paints safely are in TNS IV/4 and III/5 (in our [Index](#) under *Paints*). Advice on wood treatments to choose and avoid is in TNS V/5 (in our [Index](#) under *Wood*).

Also consider taking your car to a carwash, instead of washing it at home, to ensure that cleaners and petroleum products are collected not sent into creeks. (More information is in TNS VII/4, in the [Index](#) under *Carwash*.)

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Dispose of Toxics Properly

To learn more about what is toxic and how to dispose of items, see <www.recyclenow.org> or the Recycling Guide in your phone book (under "R" in the yellow pages). Or call 565-3375.

Recall, continued

Pittle, who served on the CPSC for a decade after it was created in 1973, and later was Technical Director at Consumers Union, which publishes Consumer Reports.

The problem is compounded because consumers often ignore product warnings, or never hear them, and continue to use products even after recalls. Plus hazardous products, even after recalls, are often found at discount shops or online.

What Can You Do?

■ **Buyer beware.** Be cautious when buying products, especially from discount stores or online, to ensure that they have not been recalled. Check for recalls at <www.cpsc.gov>.

■ **Read labels carefully,** to understand risks. Follow all warnings.

■ **Insist that the CPSC take better care of us.** One of the key positive roles of government is to ensure product standards so that we can buy without worry. For group actions you can support, see <www.ombwatch.org/article/articleview/4193/1/308> and <http://action.citizen.org/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=21757>.

More information and action links are at <www.healthyworld.org/china1.html>, with my TNS VII/5 article about China's toxic products.

~ Patricia Dines

SOURCE: "Dangerous Sealer Stayed on Shelves After Recall," *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 2007, <www.nytimes.com>

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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Ontario Bans Cosmetic Pesticides

This June, after years of work by health advocates, Canada's Ontario province has joined Quebec in banning the use of toxic pesticides for cosmetic (non-essential) purposes. The law takes effect in 2009 and education programs are expected to help people change practices.

Ontario's Liberal government introduced the legislation on Earth Day this year, keeping one of its key election promises. The next day, Home Depot, one of Canada's largest retailers, and Canadian Tire, the country's largest garden supplier, announced that they would voluntarily stop selling these pest control products in Ontario later this year, replacing them with less-harmful alternatives. Loblaw Cos. Ltd food chain was the first retailer to remove pesticides from its garden centers, in 2003.

Groups supporting this ban included the Canadian Cancer Society,

the Ontario Medical Association, the David Suzuki Foundation, and Environmental Defence. The Ontario College of Family Physicians has said that long-term effects from pesticide exposure can be devastating, especially to pregnant women and children, leading to learning disabilities, birth defects, and miscarriages.

While the bill is a significant step forward, it did have one serious weakness, according to the Canadian Environmental Law Association: It removed municipalities' rights to protect citizens through their own bylaws, and would nullify existing local laws. An estimated 140 local Canadian communities have sought to eliminate pesticide use through municipal bylaws. Various groups are calling for removal of this provision, including the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, who said that the law needs to set a base upon which to build other bylaws, not a ceiling to prevent further protections.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: <www.cela.ca>

Reducing America's Costly Chronic Diseases

Chronic diseases impact more than people's health and lives. They're also costing us economically.

A recent report by the nonprofit Milken Institute estimates that, in addition to the nearly \$300 billion in direct costs to our economy for treating chronic disease (among those not in nursing homes), these illnesses also silently drain another \$1 trillion a year in lost productivity. If we don't change our direction, that amount could jump to \$6 trillion by 2050.

However, by taking modest but key actions now to prevent these diseases, the U.S. could avoid 40 million cases of chronic illness by 2023, and reduce economic impact by 27% or \$1.1 trillion annually.

"By investing in good health, we can add billions of dollars in economic growth in the coming decades," said DeVol.

The study looked at seven chronic diseases affecting more than half of

all Americans, including cancer, heart disease, pulmonary conditions, and mental disorders. Despite dramatic improvements in treatments, disease rates have risen dramatically, inflating total medical expenditures. Each malady has been linked to behavioral and/or environmental factors that prevention programs could address.

"Every year, millions of people are diagnosed, and every year millions die of these diseases," said Ross DeVol, principal report author and Milken's Director of Regional Economics.

Dr. Richard H. Carmona, 17th U.S. Surgeon General and Chairperson of the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease, said that, "for both the physical and economic health of our country, we must bring together all sectors to find new, innovative, and cost-effective ways to prevent chronic disease. Any funding that we spend... today will actually be a valuable investment — with long-term dividends."

SOURCES: "Chronic disease fight could save billions," Larry Lipman, *Press Democrat*, Oct. 3, 2007 • The Milken Institute <www.milkeninstitute.org>