



A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

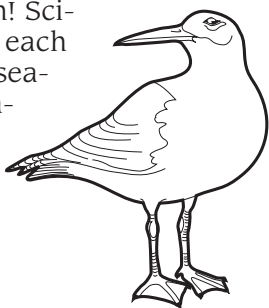
Preventing Plastic Pollution

I recently discovered another reason to keep plastics out of our shared environment.

It turns out that, in addition to its own toxic components, plastics in the wild become virtual sponges for other human-made toxics, such as PCBs and DDT. In one study, plastic was found to absorb up to one million times the level of these poisons in the water itself.

Plastic's benefit of durability means that it's long-lasting in the environment. Instead of biodegrading back into nature, it "photodegrades," breaking into increasingly smaller pieces. Animals eat these toxic pellets, which fill their bellies, block vital nutrients, compromise their health, and bioaccumulate toxics up the food chain — including into the fish that we and other larger creatures eat.

Plastics are cluttering even the most remote and once-pristine places on earth. For instance, in the northern Pacific Ocean, there's a so-called plastic island (more accurately a trash spiral) estimated to be the size of Texas and a mind-boggling 3.5 million tons. A researcher here found six pounds of plastic for every pound of plankton! Scientists estimate that each year at least a million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals and sea turtles die from eating or getting entangled in plastic.



A Better Way

The good news is that we can recycle plastic, remaking it into composite lumber, railroad ties, playground items, clothing, carpeting, and new bags. However, currently only about 3% of plastics are recycled.

■ **Plastics accepted here.** In addition to household plastic containers, North Bay Corp. (which handles all of Sonoma County's recycling) now takes clean plastic bags and other soft film plastics in the blue recycling can (though not at RecycleTown).

You can also drop plastic bags at most grocery stores. This is actually preferable, because they'll stay cleaner if not mixed with other materials, and thus be more usable domestically.

■ **Getting more info.** For a handy flyer describing plastic bag and film recycling, see <http://unicycler.com/pdf/plastic_bags.pdf>. There's also a flyer summarizing the blue can's overall rules, though it has the older plastics info, at <http://unicycler.com/pdf/sonoma_county_ssr_brochure.pdf>. Find more recycling specifics in the AT&T Yellow Pages (under "R"), at <www.recyclenow.org>, and from the EcoDesk (707) 565-3375.

The Bigger Picture

Of course, to truly decrease our earth impact, we must also "reduce and reuse" the plastics in our lives. For instance, you can:

■ **Buy a reusable grocery bag.** Each reusable bag can eliminate 1,000 plastic shopping bags over its lifetime.

See Plastic, over

Healthier Holidays – On a Budget

You can create healthier, less-toxic holidays — and save money too! Here are some ideas to get you started:

■ **Decorate with nature.** Bringing nature inside helps you create a holiday mood while reducing toxic manufacturing and waste. How does your backyard inspire your creativity? Turn branches, leaves, pine cones, and seasonal foods into attractive centerpieces, wreaths, and mantelpiece décor. You can even explore nature's art with family and friends. After the festivities, offer what's left to the birds and compost pile.

■ **Use natural scents.** Replace commercial scents and their mystery ingredients (often toxic petrochemicals) with diluted essential oils in a spray bottle; fresh flowers in a vase; or herbs simmering in water or thrown in the fireplace. Much better!

■ **Give less-toxic gifts.** Choose organic foods and clothing, toys made from natural materials, and books that educate people about creating a healthier home and world. The options are plentiful!

■ **Manage pests less-toxically.** Discourage ants without toxic sprays by removing what's attracting them, blocking their entry points, and wiping paths clean with a soapy sponge. Remove mold and reduce regrowth with diluted tea tree oil.

■ **Discard responsibly.** Setup an easy system for guests to help recycle holiday trash. Keep toxics out of landfills by recycling your old techno-toys, including computers, TVs, phones, etc. More recycling information is at <www.recyclenow.org> and in the Recycling Guide in your Yellow Pages.

By being creative, we can truly make this a season of love for all. For more about the above suggestions, look up past TNS issues by topic at <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html>. For more eco-holiday ideas, see <www.healthyworld.org/ecoholidays.html>.

~ Patricia Dines

Plastic, continued

Ideally, choose one made of organic cotton or recycled plastic.

■ **Buy a reusable water bottle**, to avoid purchasing single-use ones. Consider stainless steel and hard plastic options.

■ **Buy food in bulk**, to reduce the plastic packaging you use.

■ **Reuse your plastic bags and containers**. I dry my washed bags with Real Goods' counter bag dryer <www.realgoods.com>. Then they and my reusable containers go inside my cloth bag, ready for use at the store. Other bags line my garbage cans and collect compost materials.

■ **Give away unneeded plastic shopping bags**, for instance to a thrift store.

■ **Complete the loop and buy recycled**. View recycled products, from coasters to jewelry to furniture, at <www.RecycleStore.com>.

~ 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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Updates on Past Stories

Healing Bhopal's Toxic Tragedy

In 1984, residents of Bhopal, India, were awakened by a catastrophic toxic gas release which killed over 20,000 people; made hundreds of thousands ill; and continues to poison people through their contaminated environment and water supply. (See more about this in TNS VI/5.)

Finally this August, after 24 years of insufficient action and 130 days of survivor protests (with international support), India's government announced that they'll address some survivor demands by setting up a commission to help rehabilitate victims and clean up the area's hazardous waste.

The Bhopali campaigners say they now will turn to monitoring the new commission's progress, holding Dow Chemical responsible for paying for cleanup and rehabilitation, and prosecuting the company for registering pesticides in India via bribery.

For more information, see Pesticide Action Network's webpage <www.panna.org/bhopal>.

China's Poisoned Products Continue

In the spring of 2007, a series of crises revealed toxics (including lead and melamine) in a wide variety of Chinese products, including seafood, processed foods, pet food, toothpaste, and children's toys. (More about this is in TNS VII/5.)

After initially evading inquiries, China finally acted, closing factories, announcing new regulations, and clearly hoping to restore consumer confidence and preserve export markets. They even executed the disgraced chief of China's food and drug agency, after he was convicted of accepting bribes to allow fake medicine onto the domestic market.

Unfortunately, China's problems continue. Recently, the widespread melamine contamination of baby formula and powdered milk, sickening nearly 53,000 children, has led to the resignation of China's food safety watchdog and the firing of other of-

ficials. Melamine, used to make plastics and fertilizer, is believed to be added to watered-down milk to mask the protein deficiency and cut costs.

Especially damaging is tainted milk from Sanlu, China's largest powdered milk producer, which had been highlighted as a reputable company with stringent quality controls. Problem reports there as early as December 2007 went unaddressed, making the situation worse.

Baby formula and other milk products have been pulled from stores around China and in other Asian countries. The World Health Organization is talking with Chinese officials about how to strengthen their food quality system.

SOURCE: "China's product safety watchdog steps down," by Tini Tran, Associated Press <http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080923/ap_on_re_as/as_china_baby_formula_recall>

FOR MORE INFO: For a more in-depth look at China's environmental and regulatory problems, see "The Last Empire: China's Pollution Problem Goes Global," by Jacques Leslie, Mother Jones, Dec. 10, 2007 <www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2008/01/the-last-empire.html>

California's Toxic Protections Increase

In previous issues, we've discussed various toxics found in consumer products, risking harm to people and the environment. This September, two landmark chemical policy reform bills were signed into California law, increasing the state's ability to keep toxic chemicals out of consumer products and laying the framework for a broader approach to regulating dangerous chemicals.

Both bills passed the legislature with broad bipartisan support, signaling that lawmakers are ready to move from the current piecemeal approach. Organizations helping craft this pioneering legislation were the Sierra Club, the Breast Cancer Fund, the California League of Conservation Voters, and Environment California. "Our laws need to catch up with the science," said Jeanne Rizzo, R.N., president of the Breast Cancer Fund.

FOR MORE INFO: See <www.breastcancerfund.org/site/pp.asp?c=kwKXLdPaE&b=71144>.