



A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Healthy Living Can Be Easy

The **STEP Online Index** is overflowing with information to help you live less-toxically.

Look there for information about fending off **mosquitoes** without the toxic DEET repellent, keeping **teenagers** safe from toxics at work, and protecting our **water** resources by properly disposing of **paints** and washing your **car**.

There are also tips for less-toxically **cleaning** your house, **freshening** your air, caring for **pets**, managing **pests**, and creating a vibrant **lawn or garden**. Plus find out more about proper **disposal** of toxics, **medications**, and more — all at <www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html>.

Properly Disposing of Our Techno-Toys

Some of the more enjoyable aspects of our modern civilization come via our technological devices, including TVs, stereos, phones, computers, game players, and more. However, if these electronics are discarded improperly, their hidden toxics can harm both humans and the planet. For example, up to 40% of the toxic lead in U.S. landfills comes from electronics. (We explored this topic further in *TNS IV/5*.)

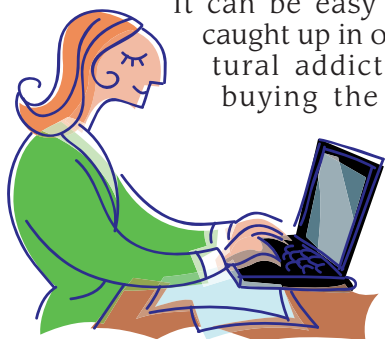
What Can We Do?

Luckily, there are many ways that we can help avoid the harm of electronic waste (or e-waste), while also making better use of the value still remaining in our products.

1) Don't throw electronics in the trash. According to the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency (SCWMA), "an electronic device is anything with a circuit board. Look for products with digital displays and programmable features." This includes consumer electronics, computer and office equipment, and household appliances.

2) Extend your products' lives.

It can be easy to get caught up in our cultural addiction to buying the latest



gizmo. However, each electronic product has significant embedded environmental costs in its manufacture, distribution, and disposal. To make the best use of this eco-investment, explore repairing or upgrading an item before discarding it.

3) Donate for reuse. Your next step could be to offer your unwanted item to a friend, school, or charity. Or post an ad for free on **Craigs List** (www.craigslist.org) or **SonoMax** (www.sonomax.org). Another great option is Santa Rosa's non-profit **Computer Recycling Center** (570-1600, www.crc.org), which refurbishes many items for resale and to donate to non-profits. (You can also get deals there on computer equipment.)

4) Dispose at appropriate sites. Next, ask the manufacturer if it has a **takeback program**, or look for an **e-waste collection event**. (See the box, right, for some upcoming ones.) You can also drop many items at **Sonoma County's Refuse Disposal Sites**, including the Petaluma dump. Additionally, **some towns** (including Sebastopol) accept small electronics in the blue recycling cans, and **some stores** accept drop-offs.

For more about these options, see the **SCWMA website** (www.recyclenow.org) or **Recycling Guide** (in the AT&T Yellow Pages under "R"; then turn to page 20). Or call 565-3375. Note: When choosing a drop-off site, identify what items they accept, their hours, any fees, and tax deductibility. Also, remove any batteries.

5) Buy new electronics selectively, prioritizing those that avoid

Upcoming Free E-waste Collection Events

Sat. Aug 22, Guerneville • 16405 Hwy. 116 (Park & Ride at River Rd., across from Safeway) • 8:30am-4:30pm • Questions? ASL Recycling, (408) 468-0230, www.aslrecycling.com

Sat. Sept 5, Sebastopol • Park Side School, 7450 Bodega Ave. (at Dutton) • 10am-4pm • Questions? 829-7400, jkreissmanibo@sebusd.org

Sat. & Sun. Sept. 12 & 13, Sebastopol • City Corporation yard, 714 Johnson St. • 8:30am-4:30pm • Questions? ASL Recycling (408) 468-0230, www.aslrecycling.com

For more event dates, see the SCWMA website (www.recycle-now.org). ASL and SCWMA are working together to regularly hold local collection events.

toxics and are energy-efficient. For specific green gadget advice, see <www.epeat.net> and <www.greenpeace.org/usa/news/green-gadgets-the-search-con>.

~ Patricia Dines

Safety in Sunscreen

Along with summertime comes that perennial question: **What sunscreen shall we buy to best protect our family's health?**

Assisting us with that inquiry is a 2008 investigation from the Environmental Working Group (EWG). Unfortunately, after extensively studying 918 name-brand products, EWG found that a stunning **"4 out of 5 sunscreen products offer inadequate protection from the sun, or contain ingredients with significant safety concerns."** Only 14% of the products analyzed block both UVA and UVB radiation, stay stable in sunlight, and avoid ingredients with known or suspected health hazards. Products often contain materials that are toxic, absorb into the blood, build up in the body or environment, or cause allergic reactions.

The most surprising finding? "Leading brands were the worst offenders," says EWG. Even worse, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) still hasn't finalized the comprehensive sunscreen safety standards they

began drafting 30 years ago. (Yes, really!) This limbo status allows manufacturers to make product claims that would be "unacceptable" or misleading under the FDA's draft standards, including claiming "all day protection," "chemical-free," and "blocks all harmful rays."

EWG considers the current regulatory situation unacceptable and calls for the FDA to set mandatory sunscreen safety standards, as directed by Congress. It also encourages the agency to streamline their review process and approve newer safer ingredients that are "in widespread use elsewhere in the world."

Fortunately, there's also good news. EWG has identified 132 products that offer "very good" sun protection using ingredients with minimal health risks. Their online database offers assessments of specific products, sorted various ways. I also appreciate the information they have to help me better understand my decision criteria.

For instance, I learned here that high SPF numbers indicate protection from UVB rays (which are linked



to sunburn and skin cancer) but not necessarily from UVA rays (the more deeply penetrating radiation that's been linked to cancer, skin aging, and immune suppression).

According to EWG, more than one million Americans are diagnosed with non-malignant skin cancer each year and another 60,000 develop malignant melanoma.

For more information about the study, specific brands and ingredients, skin safety information, and answers to FAQs, see <www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/special/sunscreens2008/summary.php>. There's even a link there for quickly sending a letter about this to the FDA.

Chemical Protections

In previous newsletters (*TNS VI/5* and *VI/6*), I've talked about the harm that toxics cause at all phases of their life cycle. This includes the risk of accidental release at facilities that

manufacture and use dangerous chemicals. **The U.S. Army estimates that an attack on just one U.S. chemical plant could kill or injure 900,000 to 2.4 million people.** The EPA has identified 100 chemical plants that each endanger one million or more people up to 25 miles from a plant.

To address this hazard, a "blue-green coalition" of more than 50 organizations is calling for passage of a new bill that would increase safety standards for facilities using potentially dangerous chemicals, and encourage transition to safer materials. The groups signing on include the Sierra Club, Physicians for Social Responsibility, U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), Greenpeace, and the UAW.

Called The Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Act of 2009 (H.R. 2868), this legislation would replace the weaker and temporary 2006 Act,

which actually prevented the government from requiring the use of safer methods and exempted 2,600 facilities from regulations. Chemical industry lobbyists want to make the 2006 Act permanent.

U.S. PIRG Public Health Advocate Elizabeth Hitchcock, in testimony with the Homeland Security Committee, said that **enacting H.R. 2868 "would protect millions of citizens** who reside and work alongside such plants and facilities with the potential to cause death or serious injury."

For more information, and to take action, see <www.uspirg.org/issues/healthy-communities/safer-communities>.

I'd also add that the high cost and effort of trying to protect ourselves from chemical accidents and attacks is just another problem our culture can avoid when we choose less-toxic solutions instead.

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.

Newsletter Editor, Lead Writer & Layout: Patricia Dines, Email <STEP@healthyworld.org>

Newsletter Editorial Team: Patricia Dines and Jim Gleaves

Newsletter Design Concept & Logo Design: Lyn Dillin (née Bouguereau)

STEP Founders: Michael Black, Patricia Dines, Rebecca Dwan, Jeff Edelheit, Nan Fuchs, Craig Litwin, and Larry Robinson.

STEP, P. O. Box 1776, Sebastopol CA 95473
<www.ci.sebastopol.ca.us>