

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Sparkling Your Home with Baking Soda

In past issues, we've discussed how you can avoid the toxics in mainstream cleansers by using less-toxic alternatives. With simple basics such as vinegar, baking soda, and liquid soap, you can make your supply cabinet lighter, reduce packaging waste, create a healthier home and world — and save money too!

In this article, I'll further examine one of those key cleaning materials, baking soda (aka sodium bicarbonate). This fine white crystalline powder is a versatile tool for washing, scrubbing, and deodorizing. It's mildly abrasive without scratching, absorbs odors and moisture, and balances pH. Plus it's inexpensive, safe to store, and makes everything smell fresh and clean!

Baking soda also now comes in different packaging options, including a shaker, resealable bag, and "spill-proof" fridge box.

Here are some of the many ways that you can use baking soda in keeping a clean and healthy home.

■ **Clean and deodorize household surfaces.** Mix baking soda

with water in a bucket to wash most surfaces in your kitchen and bathroom — even stainless steel sinks, toasters, and chrome. Then wipe surfaces with water and they'll shine! Note: Don't use baking soda on aluminum items.

■ **For more scrubbing power, sprinkle baking soda on a sponge or make a paste.** This is useful for removing stains, including on marble, Formica, coffee cups, and plastic containers. A toothbrush or

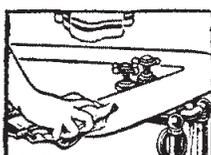
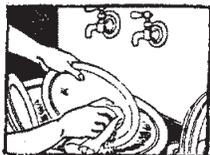
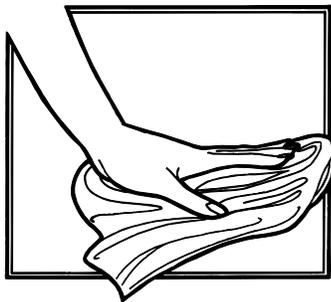
brush can provide even more power, for instance with grout or to remove crayon marks from walls. You can also add baking soda to liquid soap for a non-abrasive soft scrub.

■ **Clean and deodorize containers.** Combine three tablespoons baking soda with a quart

of water to wash and remove smells from baby bottles, plastic containers, Thermos bottles, and glass or stainless steel coffee pots. Don't use with aluminum.

■ **Deodorize your fridge.** In addition to cleaning your fridge with baking soda and water, put a baking soda container inside to absorb odors. Stir the contents occasionally to increase effectiveness. Replace periodically.

■ **Freshen your trash can or diaper pail.** After washing with baking soda and water, let the can dry,



More Uses for Baking Soda

■ **Soothe a bee sting.** Make a paste of baking soda and water then put it on the sting to quickly relieve itching, redness, and swelling. It has a neutralizing pulling action that's also useful for bug bites, jellyfish stings, and sunburns.

■ **Apply a natural deodorant.** To absorb sweat and odors, rub the dry powder underarm, or mix with water in a small spray bottle.

■ **Treat acid indigestion.** Sip baking soda in water to neutralize acids. (Read essential instructions on the box label.)

■ **Soak your body.** Immerse your weary feet in warm water and three tablespoons baking soda. Or draw a bath and add a half cup. It also softens skin.

■ **Bake muffins.** Baking soda is used in some recipes to help batter to rise. It's also one of the ingredients in baking powder.

then sprinkle the inside bottom with baking powder before putting in your garbage bag.

■ **Unclog your drain.** Clean a slow drain by pouring in half a cup of baking soda, then half a cup of vinegar. Cover the drain if possible. This creates a little explosion and breaks down soap's fatty acids. After 15 minutes, rinse with boiling water. (Note: Don't do this after using a toxic drain cleaner.) As ongoing maintenance, pour in half a cup of baking soda then three cups of boiling water.

■ **Boost your laundry.** Add a quarter cup of baking soda to a full wash load to help freshen, brighten, deodorize, and soften clothing.

■ **Deodorize carpets.** Sprinkle baking soda on rugs, let sit for 15 minutes, then vacuum. This can also reduce odors in the vacuum itself! You

See BAKING SODA, over

Tip: You can save money and be green by using your baking soda twice. Thus, after it's deodorized your fridge, use it for cleaning or to maintain your sink drain.

Mercury Pollution Permeating Our Fish

A recent federal study found toxic mercury in every fish tested at nearly 300 streams across the country. This paints a disturbing picture of how widespread mercury pollution has become. It also presents challenges for consumers seeking to include the health benefits of fish in their diets.

Mercury harms our neurological systems (including thinking, memory, language, and motor skills) and can cause mild to severe learning disabilities. Children and fetuses are especially vulnerable.

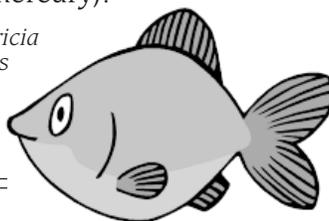
The researchers at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) identified coal power plant emissions as the main source of the mercury. They also detected high levels near areas mined for mercury and gold. Although all the tested fish contained mercury, only about a quarter were over the

EPA's "acceptable" limit (for people eating average amounts of fish).

To help address this problem, the Environmental Working Group has called for strong consumption advisories for mercury in fish. Additionally, the Obama administration has said that it will craft new laws to control power plant mercury emissions.

For more about government action, see (www.enviroblog.org/2009/01/something-fishy.html). Consumer guidance about which fish species to choose and avoid is at (www.ewg.org/safefishlist) and (www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx). People who fish can review advisories for specific water bodies at (www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/states.html). For more about the USGS report, see (<http://water.usgs.gov/nawqa/mercury>).

~ Patricia Dines



EU: Cancer Prevention Must Address Environmental Factors

This June, the European Commission (EC) released their *Communication on Cancer*, which officially acknowledged for the first time that cancer prevention must equally address environmental, lifestyle, and occupational causes. Historically, prevention activities have focused primarily on shifting lifestyle risk factors such as smoking.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) calls this statement an important step forward in recognizing the environmental dimension of cancer prevention. HEAL points to the many environmental factors known to contribute to cancer, including carcinogenic chemicals, pesticides, and air pollution particulates. Changes in policy are vital, they say, to reduce people's involuntary exposure to these chemicals.

"As individuals, we have very limited choice about the quality of the

air we breathe, the water we drink, and the level of chemical contamination in our indoor and outdoor environments," says Lisette van Vliet, HEAL's Chemicals Policy Advisor.

In September 2008, the European Parliament noted "the increasing scientific evidence [that] chemical substances, radiation, airborne particles ... [and] other environmental factors" are key causes of cancer. In the U.S., medical experts have also recommended that cancer prevention activities recognize the links between cancer and everyday chemicals.

In their *Communication*, the EC noted the high costs of cancer to society, including financial, and thus the benefits of investing in Europe's future health. They proposed a European Partnership for Action Against Cancer, with the goal of reducing new cancer cases by 15% by 2020.

For more information, see (www.env-health.org). Also, San Francisco's nonprofit Breast Cancer Action is one of the few U.S. cancer groups calling for reduced exposure to carcinogens (www.bcaction.org).

Baking Soda, continued

can also add lavender blossoms or an essential oil to the baking soda, to leave a lovely scent. (Note: Using baking soda on carpets is not recommended for very humid areas where the soda can remain in the carpet.)

■ **Deodorize your mop and brushes** by soaking them in a gallon of water with 4 tablespoons of baking soda.

■ **Reduce odors in shoes** by sprinkling baking soda inside.

■ **Remove strong odors from hands.** Eliminate fish, onion, or garlic odors by either rubbing with dry baking soda or washing with a blend of three parts baking soda to one part water or liquid soap. Then rinse.

■ **Take tarnish from coins** by dropping them in a mix of baking soda, warm water, and aluminum foil.

■ **Keep cut flowers fresh longer** by adding a teaspoon to vase water.

So what's the takeaway message from this? Anytime you want to clean, scrub, deodorize, or neutralize — think baking soda!

For more information, see (www.armhammer.com). More about other less-toxic cleaning tools is under "Cleaners" in our newsletter index (www.healthyworld.org/STEP/Index.html). I'd also love to hear what less-toxic cleaning methods work for you!

~ 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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