



# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Keeping Your Holidays Healthy

In past issues, we've talked about the many ways you can reduce your toxic exposures during the holidays, in order to protect your family's health and often even save money!

Our suggestions have included ideas for: decorating with nature (instead of buying toxic items at the store); scenting naturally (to avoid the often-hidden toxics in commercial fragrances); giving less-toxic gifts (ranging from wooden toys to educational books); and managing pests and cleaning your house less-toxically. For more specifics on these and other options, look at our [Online Index](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html) at [www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html) (under *Holidays* and other topics).

## Detoxing Your Toys

One concern of special interest at holiday time is how to avoid toxic toys. Increased mainstream attention on this issue has helped bring forward important information both about problem products and less-toxic alternatives. There are lots of useful resources online; here are two good places to start:

■ **U.S. PIRG.** See [www.uspirg.org/issues/toy-safety](http://www.uspirg.org/issues/toy-safety) for PIRG's annual "Trouble In Toyland" toy safety survey, plus their handy toy shopping guide and current regulatory information.



■ **Healthystuff.org.** Look here for information about the toxics in a wide variety of products. Their toys page is [www.healthystuff.org/departments/toys](http://www.healthystuff.org/departments/toys). Download their mobile application to access their product database while you're at the store.

You can use these and the other helpful resources available to find less-toxic toys and other gifts, making this a safer holiday season for all!

## Reforming Regulation

Unfortunately, even with the healthier options available, there are still many toxic items on store shelves, most with inadequate labeling. This makes it impossible for consumers to protect ourselves solely through our purchasing decisions.

Therefore, we need to also act as citizens to insist that our government protect us from materials that compromise our health and ecosystems.

Positive movement has recently emerged on this front, as the EPA is finally championing long-needed changes to the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). However, given likely industry resistance, community pressure is vital to take advantage of this rare opportunity to significantly improve the toxic regulation system.

## The Cost of Everyday Toxics

Dr. Philip Landrigan, chair of preventive medicine at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, advises that reducing toxic exposure is essential to combat

See TSCA, over

## Peroxide Deodorizer

In a recent conversation with Sebastopol's Ryn Longmaid, she enthusiastically told me about her favorite deodorizing tool: hydrogen peroxide. Inexpensive and easily found in drugstores and beyond (in the familiar brown bottle), hydrogen peroxide is simply diluted  $H_2O_2$ , or water with an extra oxygen atom.

Ryn says that she's delighted with how well hydrogen peroxide cleans and removes smells from her water bottles and coffee travel cups. She just pours in a little  $H_2O_2$ , adds water, then swishes or lets it soak. This easily eliminates odors, she reports, without leaving behind its own smell or taste. This method works better for her than soap (which doesn't eliminate the smells), vinegar (which leaves behind its own taste and scent), and the hassle of boiling bottles.

Ryn also uses hydrogen peroxide in her laundry, tossing a big capful in with each load to remove stains and smells. She finds that it's even effective at deodorizing her husband's hockey gear!

To make  $H_2O_2$  easier to use, Ryn pours it into tall squeeze bottles (such as those used for ketchup and mustard), which she keeps handy in her bathroom and kitchen.

Hydrogen peroxide also has various other household uses, including my personal favorite: cleaning minor cuts and abrasions. (The bubbling is the extra oxygen atoms breaking free!)

Online fans tout various other applications, including using it as a replacement for toxic chlorine bleach in cleaning mold and disinfecting cutting boards. Folks also use it as a mouthwash, toothbrush sanitizer, plant fertilizer — even to remove skunk odor (mixed with baking soda and hand soap).

Thankfully, I haven't had to try that last one yet, though it's good to know, just in case....

For many more uses, see [www.using-hydrogen-peroxide.com](http://www.using-hydrogen-peroxide.com).

## Be Safe With Rat Poison

I recently received a letter from Karen Clyde of Sebastopol, urging us to write about the "dangers of rat poison to our domestic pets, as well as birds and fish."

She says, "Our 2-year-old cat Panda is recovering (and not yet out of the woods) from ingesting rat poison. A neighbor put 'a little bit' out in an obscure corner of her yard. Panda just barely escaped death. One blood transfusion, numerous tests, vitamin K, and \$800 later, we are [still] nursing her back to health."

Karen wants people to know that even a small amount of rat poison can be highly toxic to curious pets, wildlife, and children. Also, if a poisoned rat is eaten by another animal, it too will be consuming that poison. Thousands of wildlife deaths annually are estimated to be caused this way — killing the hawks, owls, and other animals that otherwise control rodents naturally.

So, what are you to do if you have a rodent problem? As usual, we ad-

vised looking first for less-toxic solutions. You'll reduce the harm to "non-target" species, including pets and children, as well as avoid the risk of mice and rats dying behind walls and leaving an unreachable stench.

In *TNS VII/3*, I described various alternative approaches to managing mice. (Download the article from our [Online Index](#), under *Mice*.) Simple solutions include keeping a "mouser" cat and using Havahart traps, which catch animals alive for later release. Look for these traps, sized for various animals, at local stores or [www.havahart.com](http://www.havahart.com). (Note: Even snap traps, though I really don't like them, are preferable to poison.)

You can also often prevent rodents from entering your home, for instance by blocking their entrance point(s) and storing your food in secure containers. A professional can help with rodent-proofing; look for one committed to less-toxic options.

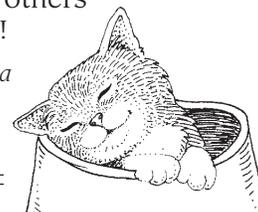
For a systematic methodology to identify less-toxic approaches for a wide variety of pests, read about the Integrated Pest Management process in *TNS II/6* (see [Index](#) under *IPM*).

If you've explored less-toxic solutions and are considering a rodent control product, please read labels to understand risks and identify less-toxic options. More tips about this are in *TNS V/4* (in the [Index](#), under *Pesticides, Assessing*).

And, if you do end up using a toxic product, Karen asks that you make it inaccessible to animals. One solution is a tamper-proof bait station, which allows rodents in but keeps children and pets out. See one option at [www.e-bug.net/cgi-bin/store/commerce.cgi?product=Baits#cmousestation](http://www.e-bug.net/cgi-bin/store/commerce.cgi?product=Baits#cmousestation). Note: Although this is an improvement, there's still a risk that rats will drop the toxics outside for others to find, or eat them and become a poisonous meal for another creature.

Karen ends her note, "Thanks for what you do with your newsletter." That's always nice to hear, and we're glad to be of service. And thank you for sharing your experience with us. We encourage others to do the same!

~ Patricia  
Dines



### TSCA, continued

the rising rates of birth defects, asthma, neuro-developmental disorders, and other major diseases harming children in the U.S. and beyond. Additional health problems linked to everyday chemicals include breast and brain cancer, lowered sperm

counts, early puberty, diabetes, attention deficit disorder, and autism.

These illnesses aren't just costing us emotionally. Landrigan estimates that chronic childhood diseases tied to toxic exposure are costing the U.S. \$55 billion a year.

Still, for thousands of chemicals, toxicity information isn't publicly available, even as tests consistently find these materials in our bodies.

Landrigan concludes that, "The environment is a powerful determinant of human health," and children are especially vulnerable.

### The Emerging Solution

That's why many public health advocates were delighted this September to hear EPA administrator Lisa Jackson declare that overhauling TSCA is one of her top priorities.

Most observers agree that TSCA, the 1976 law intended to regulate

everyday chemicals, has been stunningly ineffective. Since it was passed 33 years ago, the EPA has only required testing of about 200 chemicals, while over 80,000 chemicals are currently being used in commerce.

Legislation to reform TSCA is expected to finally be introduced in Congress this fall. Jackson has outlined the principles she'd like to see reflected there, including: better standards to protect health and the environment; improved data from manufacturers; special consideration of vulnerable populations, especially children; encouragement of green chemistry's safer chemicals; fulfillment of the public's right to know; and EPA authority for timely action.

For more about how you can support truly protective reforms, see [www.saferchemicals.org](http://www.saferchemicals.org), [www.healthystuff.org](http://www.healthystuff.org), [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org) (under *Toxics*), and [www.epa.gov/oppt](http://www.epa.gov/oppt).

~ 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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