

THE NEXT STEP

Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



What Is STEP?

The Sebastopol Toxics Education Project (STEP) is an innovative City/Citizen partnership with a simple goal: **to help protect the health of Sebastopol's water, watershed, people, and animals from the known harm of everyday toxics.**

The Sebastopol City Council created this project in 2000. Because the Council wanted to include the whole town in this mutual-support vision, it decided to put a helpful newsletter into City water bills.

Local citizen volunteers then brought this newsletter idea to life. Since 2001, various folks have explored these ideas and worked diligently to create quality information that helps you nurture yourself and our community by avoiding everyday toxics. We love taking action for a healthier town and world!

Thank You For Your Feedback!

Thank you to all the Sebastopol residents who took the time to send in your STEP Feedback cards for our annual reader survey.

We appreciate hearing your thoughts about the newsletter, including how you use it and what articles you'd like to see in the future. **We're interested in what's helpful to you!** Plus, your participation supports this innovative and pioneering community project.

So, what were your responses?

■ **88% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "Yes!" and "Really appreciated!"

■ **Of those responding about pesticide use, only 23% said that you use pesticides at home or work. Yay! Of those using pesticides, 39% use just natural/nontoxic pesticides,** 15% use synthetic/toxic products, and 46% use both.

■ **We're delighted that 79% of you said that this newsletter has helped you reduce or avoid the use of toxics.** That really makes our work feel worthwhile!

For instance, readers said that our information has helped you: avoid toxics when managing ants and weeds; select healthier hand and face lotions; reduce your use of plastics; and choose to use "No more Roundup." Good job!

One reader said, "Thank you for continuing to send *The Next STEP*."

It's always a pleasure to read." Another said, "Thank you so much for all the years of service and information!"



Congratulations to everyone who's finding ways to reduce or avoid using toxics. With these choices, you're supporting a healthier and safer water supply, town, and environment for yourself, your family, and our community. What we do in our daily lives really does help to create our world!

Also thank you for your questions and ideas for future articles; you'll find answers already appearing in this issue, and in upcoming editions.

As always, we appreciate your acknowledgment of our work. We're delighted to be of assistance.

Please keep your feedback coming! Your input helps us create a newsletter that's useful for you!

Did You Know?

***The Next STEP* costs the City almost nothing.** It's a bonus for you, created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense. Its small copying cost is a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's \$19 million annual budget. Given the consistent evidence that common toxics are harming us all, this is a bargain for our shared health, now and long into the future.

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• **"I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the way you approach *The Next STEP* newsletter.**

• "Sometimes, in our community, I feel like some people who are further along on the conservation spectrum have no patience with others who are less far along.

• **"But *The Next STEP* does a good job of meeting people where they are and encouraging them along the path in the right direction....**

• "When someone feels good about making an improvement, I think that they are often inspired to take another step!...

• **This is just the latest example of my regard for your work; I have wanted to thank you many times in the past.**

• Wishing you and yours good health. And may you inspire many more people to take **The Next STEP!"**

• ~ *Kathy Taylor*

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Making Good Use of Staying at Home

As we go to press, our county and state are under Stay At Home orders, and we're all experiencing upheaval, disruptions, and difficulties in various areas of our lives.

First, I share this experience and empathize with everyone for their own specific challenges.

And also, this process offers us all a chance to step back and reflect on our lives, away from our well-worn habits and hectic pace. With that, comes an opportunity for positive change, individually and collectively. I mean, if we're going to go through these difficulties, we might as well harvest some silver linings!

Musing on Your Priorities

■ **Reflect on what activities you're doing more (and less) now that you want to keep in your new normal.** Write them down to remember, then imagine how you might make that happen.

■ **Consider how you can nurture progress on world issues that matter to you.** Support the groups taking action. They just need more of us standing with them!

■ **Look for ways to support the people working on the virus' front lines or impacted by this process.**

■ **Explore these ideas with friends and family, and perhaps take action together.** Then your

harvest from this time of pause can be more than stress and entertainment, but also a future life with more of what brings us all deep joy.

Acting to Reduce Toxics

■ **Read the labels, heed the warnings, and skip the toxics in your home and yard products. Explore less-toxic alternatives.**

Reducing your toxic burden supports everyone's health! For lots of ideas and input, check the STEP Index.

■ **Keep your shoes by the door to leave germs and dirt outside.** Learn more in our past article, via the STEP Index under **Shoes**.

■ **Buy from local organic farmers.** They're reducing toxic impacts widely! Help ensure that they remain part of our community's landscape and food security. Shop at farmers' markets. Sign up for a CSA subscription. Order online. Get options at www.farmtrails.org. Support other locally-owned businesses too!

■ **Stand up for the laws that protect our health and shared environment. Support groups taking action.** These laws have been undermined over the past few years. Now this virus is being used as an excuse for widespread rules suspension — even though increased pollution can make people more sick! (See www.bit.ly/3bloqxy.)

■ **Grow your own organic food. This is a fun and fruitful activity for yourself or with others, including children.** You can get key food staples, such as fresh greens, without a trip to the store. Plus it's a good life skill for everyone! And it can help us appreciate our farmers, see the real source of our food, and marvel at the magic of nature.

Start small with foods you and your family like, to have early success. Watch the sprouts emerge in wonder. Nurture them, then serve your harvest in a special dish.

You can even include gardening in your homeschooling curriculum! Here are free class materials: www.rodaleinstitute.org/education/school-gardening-curriculum.

For more on less-toxic gardening, see the STEP Index, plus the Web.

Local Toxics Disposal

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collections Day is August 4**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event. You can also make an appointment at a different town's Collections Day. Or drop items at the Household Toxics Facility.

■ **For more about local toxics disposal**, see www.zerowastesonoma.gov or call 707/565-3375.

Be Cautious Disinfecting

We generally suggest avoiding toxic bleach, unless it's really needed. Being cautious is even more important now, as people are sharing incomplete or inaccurate information about using toxics such as bleach to cleanse and disinfect. Please investigate such tips first. Don't just trade one risk for another! For instance:

■ **Read and follow bleach package directions and warnings.** That includes diluting it and using it only on specified surfaces.

■ **Don't wash produce with toxics or even soap.** Ingesting these can cause digestive and other illnesses, and they have no proven benefit. Even vinegar isn't needed and impacts taste. Wash with water, as always. Also avoid using disinfectants on permeable packaging. See more at www.bit.ly/3eA1WLC.

■ **Don't mix chlorine bleach with other cleansers.** Combining bleach with hidden ammonia and acids can create truly deadly gases.

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- **Got a pest problem?** •
- **Or a toxics question?** •
- **The STEP Online Index can help!** It's easy to look up your topic and find our well-researched, condensed, and useful information — to help you get up-to-speed and into action. It also makes it easy to share this information! •
- www.healthyworld.org/STEP •
- **STEP** •
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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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