

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Study: Less-Toxic Personal Care Products Reduce Body Toxics

Most of us likely don't think about the toxics that might be in our everyday personal care products. This includes soap, body wash, cleanser, lotion, sunscreen, deodorant, cosmetics, shampoo, and conditioner. After all, they just go on the outside of our bodies. How big an issue could they be?

Unfortunately, though, what we use on our skin can harm our skin — and get into our bodies. That's the principle by which patches deliver medicine! (To learn more, see <https://bit.ly/2ZAqnBV> and <https://bit.ly/2ZOjkG1>.)

And conventional body products (for men, women, and children) do regularly contain toxics — including ones linked to skin allergies, headaches, fatigue, asthma attacks, neurological/liver/kidney damage, hormone disruption, fertility/reproductive/respiratory/immune issues, and cancer. (For more information, see <https://bit.ly/2OxyXIW>.)

Investigating the Toxics Inside

So how much of the toxics in these products are actually getting into our bodies? A study, published in the journal *Environmental*



Health Perspectives, asked just that question.

Researchers tested 100 teen girls (age 14 to 18) and found that 90% had detectable levels of phthalates, parabens, triclosan, and/or oxybenzone. Health impacts of these can include: skin reactions; liver damage; cancer; endocrine system harm; and damage to reproductive health, thyroid hormone levels, male testosterone levels, and DNA.

Then researchers gave participants replacement personal care products free of common chemicals. After just three days using these better products, most of these teens' chemical levels decreased by an average of 25% to 45%!

Study lead author Kim Harley, Associate Director of the UC Berkeley Center for Environmental Research and Children's Health, says that women can have higher exposure to body care toxics, because they tend to use more of these products on average than men.

Plus, she added, teen girls are at even higher risk, because they're experiencing rapid reproductive development, and tend to use even more products than adult women.

Another notable aspect of this study is that 15 Latina high school students collaborated in designing it, recruiting participants, analyzing data, and educating people afterwards. They did so as part of a community project to empower high school students and grow the next generation of environmental health leaders. All went on to become first-generation college students.

Local Toxics Disposal

■ To discard your household toxics safely, bring them to the Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility. It's at 500 Mecham Road, between Cotati and Petaluma, and is open Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 7:30am to 2:30pm.

■ Check the Zero Waste Sonoma website (www.zerowastesonoma.gov) for more information on this, or to see what city HHW Collection Events are currently scheduled. Or call 707/565-3375 or 707/364-6927.

Student Maritza Cárdenas said, "Seeing the drop in chemical levels after just three days shows that simple actions can be taken, such as choosing products with fewer chemicals, and make a difference."

What You Can Do

■ Carefully read the labels for anything you put on your body. Note that there's no legal definition for "natural" body care products. If a product you love doesn't list its ingredients on its label, look online or contact the manufacturer for an ingredient list. You can also get specific product information via the Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org) and Campaign for Safe Cosmetics (www.safecosmetics.org).

■ Choose better products. Look for 100% certified organic products; they have 100% organically grown ingredients. Also, healthier products list the ingredients they include and omit. Health food stores have better options, but even there look at labels critically to avoid significant toxics. (More tips are later in this article.)

■ Encourage other people to evaluate their body products and make healthier choices. Especially young women who might only get product advice from glossy ads.

■ Support the groups acting for better regulation to remove toxics from these products.

Using safer products is a way to nurture our health — and encourage healthier businesses!

See *Personal Care*, over

Detoxify Your Lawn

Lawns can certainly be appealing, offering a place for people, pets, and children to play. But the toxics often used to maintain them can risk harm to all of the above and more.

Go to our **Index** under **Lawns** to see these past articles on less-toxic care. They provide you an easy way to learn more, reduce toxics use, and share information with others.

■ **IV/3: Nurturing a Truly Healthy Lawn.** A good introduction. The lure of the lawn. The hidden hazards from commonly-used toxics. Evidence of their harm to people, animals, bees, butterflies, other insects, soil, and ecosystems. The steps to creating and maintaining a healthier lawn.

■ **XVII/3: Detoxing Your Weeding.** Key steps to take, including avoiding “weed and feed products,” which people often don’t realize have toxics inside. How to manage weeds without toxics.

■ **XV/2: Controlling Crabgrass.** Key tips, including getting it early.

You might also consider expanding beyond a lawn. I love wandering around Sebastopol, seeing people’s beautiful creativity with flowers, food gardens, trees, benches, art, statues, and more. Maybe you can do something more fun for you!

You can also peruse our **Online Index** under topics such as **Gardening, Assessing Toxics, Weeds, Weeds You Can Eat, Bees** — plus specific toxics and alternatives.

Support Positive Action at the U.S. EPA

While it’s essential that we choose less-toxic options at the store, **we can only partially reduce our toxic exposure that way.** Many exposures are outside of our control and **thus we also need government action to protect us.**

Notable progress has been made in government oversight over the years, through extensive citizen action. **Still, much remains to be done,** especially after the prior administration’s rollbacks.

So it was good news that, at the current EPA’s request, a federal judge vacated a rule from the prior administration’s EPA that would’ve weakened the agency’s ability to protect our health.

Additionally, one of President Biden’s first executive orders directed the EPA to review a number of toxics-related actions by the prior EPA, including:

1) Methylene chloride in paint strippers (which we’ve previously discussed). Before 2016, the EPA had

proposed banning them entirely. But the prior administration decided to allow commercial use. You can encourage the EPA to eliminate that use too via the second link under Sources.

2) Persistent bioaccumulative toxic (PBT) chemicals. Critics say the prior rule failed to achieve the significant exposure reductions required by Congress. PBTs are a priority public health threat because they don’t break down in the environment and thus accumulate up the food chain and in our bodies.

3) Toxic risk evaluations. Non-profits won a court case requiring the EPA to remedy the past EPA’s risk evaluations so they follow the law and include key exposure sources.

We can make a big difference by encouraging the EPA to address these issues and strengthen its protection of our shared health and environment overall.

SOURCES: www.saferchemicals.org/2021/02/02/judge-throws-out-trump-epas-science-censoring-rule • www.saferchemicals.org/2021/02/01/the-first-3-things-bidens-epa-must-do-to-protect-americans-from-toxic-chemicals



Personal Care, continued

For more information, go to our **Index** under **Personal Care Products**, then peruse these links:

■ **XIV/4: Detoxing Your Body Care Routine.** A good introduction, with information including: If it’s for sale, isn’t it safe? (Sadly, no.) What to look for when you shop. Specific ingredients of concern. Websites to look up products.

■ **XIV/5: Beauty Detox Redux.** Check labels for these five seals to find better products for your needs. Phasing in healthier products.

■ **XIV/3: Skip the Microbeads.** These small hard plastic balls added to all sorts of products are polluting our ecosystems and harming nature’s wild creatures. How to avoid them and choose better options.

■ **XV/5: Safely Tossing Out Body Care Products.** A step by step decision path for safe disposal.

■ **XX/6: Good news!** The California Toxic-Free Cosmetics Act passed. It bans 24 toxic chemicals from cosmetics and personal care products sold in California, starting 2025.

Also, for more on the toxics found in our bodies, see the **Index** under **Body Burden.**

SOURCES: <https://bit.ly/3pJlgdd> • <https://bit.ly/2ZHJSbO> • <https://bit.ly/3dAsZba>

• • • • •
 • **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 •
 • • • • •

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.healthyworld.org/STEP