



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Two Toxic Bans for Our Collective Health

I often talk about how important it is for us to address toxics on two fronts. (1) That we avoid personal exposure, because that trims our most direct contact and encourages vendors who are “doing it right.” And (2) That we join with others to reduce our collective use, because some exposures are best (or only) addressed that way.

But can we really make an impact on our collective pesticide use? Absolutely! That path has been proven repeatedly over the years. A key pioneer was the wonderful Rachel Carson, who touched people’s hearts and passions with her 1962 book *Silent Spring*. She inspired readers and political leaders to ban the DDT that was quieting the trills of songbirds. And she helped encourage the environmental movement that led to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Certainly, there can be challenges on that path. And yet, **when we remember what we love and act to protect it, we can find ourselves joyfully working with others to create a better future.**

To encourage us on this path of community-level action, I’m going to tell you about two recent bans that brought me good cheer. I hope they inspire you to support the next success stories!



Nearing U.S. Chlorpyrifos Ban

For decades, strong evidence has shown the **extensive harm of the neurotoxic pesticide chlorpyrifos** (“chlor-PEER-ruh-fohs”).

Like other members of the organophosphate family, **chlorpyrifos kills insects by blocking the neurological clearing process.** Thus the insect’s nervous system is overstimulated until it dies.

Unfortunately, humans have a similar neurological structure. So it’s not surprising that chlorpyrifos **can cause various neurological and neuromuscular harm to humans and other animals.** These include acute symptoms such as nausea, dizziness, confusion — and, in higher doses, paralysis and death.

Children and fetuses are especially impacted by chlorpyrifos. Studies have shown that **it can damage children’s developing brains,** resulting in lowered IQ, loss of working memory, and attention deficit disorders.

Its environmental impacts are also serious. For instance, research identified it as the third most toxic insecticide to bees. And a Fish and Wildlife Service report found that chlorpyrifos and malathion could “jeopardize the continued existence” of more than 1,200 endangered species, including some birds and fish.

Because of its toxicity, **chlorpyrifos was banned from nearly all U.S. home use nearly two decades ago. However, it’s still used on strawberries,**

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.

apples, citrus, broccoli, corn, and more. It’s one of the most common U.S. insecticides. **Residues are found** in our food, drinking water, air, and bodies. Those of us in agricultural communities are even more at risk.

But **even just our potential exposure level from food and drinking water** was sufficient for EPA scientists to advise a full ban.

A 2016 EPA revised chlorpyrifos human health risk assessment found that there are no safe levels of it in food or drinking water, or for workers even with maximum protection equipment.

The EPA under President Obama was on track to ban agricultural use of chlorpyrifos. However, that action was halted in 2017 by the next administration’s EPA. So **some states acted to protect their residents — including California,** which in 2019 banned chlorpyrifos’ agricultural use by the end of 2020. It also established resources to help farms transition to alternatives.

Also, in 2019, seven states and the District of Columbia **filed a lawsuit** challenging the EPA’s 2017 decision, in collaboration with Earthjustice and health and labor organizations.

And now finally that federal community action has borne fruit. On April 29, 2021, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ordered the EPA to ban all food uses of chlorpyrifos

See **Bans**, over

Bans, continued

or retain only the uses it could find safe for workers and children.

Earthjustice says, **“This ruling is a huge victory for children and communities** across the country who will finally be spared needless poisonings and lifelong learning disabilities.” It also called on the EPA to ban all organophosphates “to fully protect public health.”

The pesticide industry is lobbying the EPA to weaken the ban. **To speak up** for the court’s orders, see www.earthjustice.org/action/alerts.

Maine Bans PFAS by 2030

The good news followed in July, when **Maine enacted a groundbreaking law to ban the use of toxic PFAS (“PEA-fass”) in all products there by 2030**, except for uses deemed “currently unavoidable.”

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are often used to make products water and stain-resistant. They’re used across dozens of industries and added to a wide range of products, including food packaging, cosmetics, cookware, waterproof textiles, guitar strings, dental floss, firefighting foam, and stain protectors like Scotchgard (which is commonly applied to carpet and furniture).

However, an increasing body of evidence has linked these chemicals to a range of serious

health problems including cancer, liver disease, decreased immunity, kidney disease, plummeting sperm counts, endocrine disruption, high cholesterol, birth defects, and more. Some experts say that this chemical class is **simply toxic to humans**, even at very low exposure levels.

PFAS are estimated to be in the blood of 97% of Americans and the drinking water of over 100 million people. These compounds have been found at dangerous levels around the globe, including in rain, polar bears near the north pole, women’s breast milk, and marine animals. **They’ve been dubbed “forever chemicals,”** because they don’t fully break down, and thus accumulate in the environment, humans, and animals.

Some states and the federal government have passed piecemeal laws regulating use of these chemicals. However, **Maine is the nation’s first state and the world’s first government to enact a broad prohibition** on this class of about 9,000 compounds.

This action came after several years of pressure from public health advocates and independent scientists. They applauded the law and hope that other states will follow suit. They envision that this will pressure industry to stop using PFAS, and prompt a federal ban.

The European Union is also moving forward with a plan to phase out the chemicals’ use in all products by 2030, though it’s not yet adopted it as a binding measure.

So I hope these two stories inspire you to find groups protecting things you care about — and that you help these groups make our shared dreams a reality!

For more on PFAS, see www.ecowatch.com/pfas-chemicals-public-health-2648190196.html and our Index under **PFAS**. And you might support Safer States www.saferstates.com and the Environmental Working Group www.ewg.org.

SOURCES: www.earthjustice.org/news/press/2021/court-bans-pesticide-linked-to-developmental-harm-in-children • www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jul/15/maine-law-pfas-forever-chemicals-ban

Getting Healthy Help

Do you need help with a pest problem? If you’re considering hiring a pest control professional, look first for one that truly specializes in less-toxic solutions. Then **you can ask these questions** before you sign on the dotted line.

1) “What’s the scientific name of the pests I have, so I can research them?”

2) “What’s the exact name of the product you want to use?”

3) “Please give me a copy of the product label and the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for any pesticides you want to use.” These will give you information on the *acute* (immediate) toxicity and risk to yourself and others, beyond any soothing safety promises the company might have made.

Then I suggest that you:

1) Research the *chronic* (long-term) effects of that material.

You can get help with this research by looking in our Online Index under **Assessing toxics**.

2) Seek effective alternatives. These can often do a better job with less harm! See our Index for many options.

3) Be wary of any proposal to do regular spraying, either inside or outside your home — especially if they say it’s “just in case.”

Being cautious about what is brought into your home can save you, your family, and your pets so much health heartache and pain!

Thanks to Richard Bugman Fagerlund, of Ask The Bugman, for his ideas in this piece.

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- **Got a pest problem?** •
- **Or a toxics question?** •
- **The STEP Online Index can help!** It makes it easy to look up past newsletter issues by topic. There you’ll 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** •
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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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