

# THE NEXT STEP

*Toward a Healthier Future*

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



## Easy Answers

■ You can get answers to some of your survey questions about toxics and alternatives with **The STEP Online Index**, via [www.healthyworld.org/STEP](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEP). All of our past issues are there. Just look up your desired subject to read what we've written on that topic. For instance, we have articles listed under these **bolded** words.

- Healthier **beauty products, housecleaning, gardening, painting, and home repair**
- Less-toxic approaches to **weeds, ants, snails, earwigs, fleas, weeds, rodents, poison oak, and whiteflies**

- Evaluations of specific toxics, including **Roundup and 2,4-D**
- Evidence of human and pet **health problems related to toxics, including pesticides**

- Methodologies that avoid toxics, like **permaculture and IPM**

■ **Anyone can get the STEP newsletter by email.** Sign up at [www.healthyworld.org/STEP](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEP). Feel free to share this with others!

■ **The next Sebastopol Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Collection Event is July 26**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, at least 24 hours beforehand, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870; go to <https://bit.ly/3q4OB3S>; or email [toxicsdisposal@cleanharbors.com](mailto:toxicsdisposal@cleanharbors.com).

■ **For more about local toxics disposal**, including the HHW facility, see [www.zerowastesonoma.gov](http://www.zerowastesonoma.gov) or call 707/565-3375.

## Thank You For Your Feedback!



Thank you to all the Sebastopol residents who took the time to send in your STEP Survey 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?

■ **94% said that you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** Reader comments included: "Keep up the good work!" and "I think this is a great service to the community! ♥"

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **20% said that you use pesticides at home or work. Of those using pesticides, 70% use just natural/nontoxic pesticides,** 6% use synthetic/toxic products, and 24% use both.

■ We're delighted that **87% 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 control ants without poison, use vinegar to kill weeds, clean your house less-toxically, do sheet mulching, clear toxics from your garage, and "dispose [of] toxics properly." One reader said, "I finally convinced hubby not to use RoundUp, with your help!"

Others said, "I really enjoy *TNS* and always find something I can use", "Reading *TNS* makes me more aware!", "What you are doing is very helpful", "*TNS* is a great benefit to our community. Thank you," and "All the topics you cover are super interesting and informative. Thank you for this super service!"

**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 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!

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"Thanks for the latest STEP. Your well-researched piece about pressure-treated wood was very informative. **I am holding onto this for when we plan our next outdoor project.** Thanks for what you do for our world!"

~ Richard Schoellhorn

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### 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 \$21 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.

## Discouraging Mosquitoes

As summer nears, so does the specter of **blood-hungry mosquitoes rudely interrupting our hikes, picnics, and backyard barbecues.**

**But too often we hear the casually-offered advice to spray toxic DEET on ourselves and our loved ones,** without mention of its significant risk to our health. I encourage you to be sure that this risk is warranted before using it.

Here are **some options:**

■ **Prevention is the best cure. Key actions taken early around your home can prevent mosquitoes from getting a foothold** and becoming a larger problem.

**These actions include:** repairing window screens; removing standing water (in gutters, birdbaths, etc.); and installing birdhouses to attract mosquito-eating birds and bats. Also reduce bugs' attraction to your outdoor lights by turning lights off after use, installing motion sensor lights, and/or swapping in yellow "bug" lightbulbs. (The yellow color is harder for bugs to see.)

■ **To reduce bites, wear long pants and sleeves,** and avoid being out during dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.

■ **Use a regular electric fan at your backyard party, to help discourage bugs and protect people, pets, and food.** Yes, really! I just read about it recently. It's

even recommended by the American Mosquito Control Association.

**Proponents says fans are effective because:** (1) Mosquitoes are weak fliers and don't like to fly into a breeze; and (2) Fans disrupt the carbon dioxide that we breathe out, plus other cues that mosquitoes use to find us. Studies have confirmed these principles. Fans can also help discourage flies, bees, and gnats!

**A few tips:** It's great if the fan oscillates back and forth. You might need more than one fan to cover an area. A ceiling fan is also nice, say under a gazebo. And don't leave a fan outside on an ongoing basis unless it's rated outdoor for damp or wet.

Please let me know if you try this and how it works for you!

■ **For more information on the risks of DEET, the proven ingredient options, and key information for using DEET more safely, if it's needed,** see *Mosquito Protection Without Toxics*, in the Index under **Mosquitoes** (Issue VI/4).

*SOURCES: www.nytimes.com/2010/07/13/health/13real.html • www.prolampsales.com/blogs/specialty-architectural-lighting/will-a-yellow-bug-light-actually-keep-bugs-away*

## Do the Toxic Discard

■ **A reader asked what items can go to the Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) facility.**

**Here are some common categories that are accepted there (and should never go into the trash):** batteries, fluorescent and LED lightbulbs, nail polish and remover, pesticides, paint and paint thinners, antifreeze, brake fluid, oil and filters, and fuels.

**For a full list, see <https://bit.ly/3LcdFj0>.** That webpage also has links to other toxic-containing products and how to discard them. This includes computer and other electronics, pressure-treated wood, tires, and large appliances.

**Many toxic items can also be recycled (and offered for reuse) at other places.** To get options and details for specific items, go to [www.zerowaste-sonoma.gov](http://www.zerowaste-sonoma.gov) and enter the item in the search bar.

■ **Why do we need to recycle fluorescent bulbs?**

I recently replaced two fluorescent tube lights in my garage. I was deciding where to bring them to be recycled, and someone asked why I didn't just put them in the trash.

**The answer is: Mercury!** If we put these bulbs into the trash, this neurotoxic heavy metal can easily get into the environment and harm people, animals, ecosystems, and water supplies. About 75 million waste fluorescent lamps and tubes are generated annually in California. These contain more than a half a ton of mercury! The mercury in just one CFL (compact fluorescent bulb) can contaminate 6,000 gallons of water to unsafe levels.

**Mercury is also why we need to handle these bulbs carefully,** to seek to avoid breaking them. If they do break, clean them up right away. Tips for doing that safely are at [www.epa.gov/cfl/cleaning-broken-cfl](http://www.epa.gov/cfl/cleaning-broken-cfl).

**Thankfully,** Sonoma County residents can recycle these bulbs for free through our county's HHW program. And recycling captures the mercury for reuse in new bulbs.

For this small added effort, **we get the benefits of fluorescent bulbs** (compared to incandescents), including notably higher energy efficiency, longer lifespans, reduced net cost, and lower energy pollution.

■ **So what about LED bulbs?** Yes, these also offer better energy efficiency and longer lifespan, making better use of our energy resources. And unfortunately they also contain heavy metals, so dispose of these through a HHW program too. (Holiday string lights are exempted.)

### 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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**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](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEP)