

# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Avoiding Toxics Is True Disease Prevention

**Health. It's literally the foundation of our life journeys.** What our days feel like. Where our energy, attention, and resources go. What we're able to accomplish. How long we get to be here. This is true for people of all styles and backgrounds. It's something we share in common.

**Yet we can take our health for granted. Until we experience health harm,** and see the dramatic ways it can change our lives.

**And the evidence repeatedly shows that our health can be significantly compromised by the everyday toxics we and others use.** Toxics have been consistently linked to increased rates of a wide range of diseases in people and animals — including cancer, cardiovascular harm, neurocognitive damage, immune dysfunction, compromised fertility, birth defects, and more.

**These in turn can create untold ripples of physical and emotional pain, heartbreak, and financial cost** — to individuals and to us collectively. And we can be exposed to toxics wherever we are — in urban and agricultural environments, even remote areas of the earth.

And yes, we can reduce some of these exposures with our personal choices. **But some are the result of other people's choices.**

**Thus our health, this core physical experience of our life journey, is involuntarily impacted by the cumulative choices of**

**others in our community.** Like so many things in this world, we're all in the same boat together, and our well-being is tied to that of others.

**Unfortunately this essential piece of the health picture is largely missing from mainstream medical conversations** — both in the overall advice, and in our conversations with our medical professionals about avoiding or treating disease. That's because most doctors don't get training in evaluating toxic exposures or understanding the toxic links to illness.

Instead, too often what medical people call "prevention" is really just "early detection." **But wouldn't we rather just not get the illness at all?**

**Avoiding toxics can help us with that goal. And often it requires us to act for our health early, ideally before it fails.** Just as the easiest way to protect our teeth is brushing and flossing, not waiting for excruciating pain.

**And helping with that goal has been the innovative vision of this newsletter,** since it was created collaboratively by the City and community members in 2000.

**We don't have to be powerless to the toxics** in our products or our shared environment!

### What You Can Do

■ **Explore past issues of STEP using our Online Index.** Learn more about toxics' health harm, and how you can reduce exposures to protect the health of yourself and your family, pets, and community.

Dear Readers ~

It is with sadness that I report to you that **this is the last water bill edition of *The Next STEP* newsletter**, because of the City of Sebastopol's recent budget cuts.

**And still — I'm grateful for what we've accomplished together** over the past 23 years of this community collaboration.

**Thank you to everyone** who has supported, made suggestions, contributed to, or implemented the ideas in this newsletter. This shows that **we together can co-create a healthier world.**

I'll keep the past newsletters and Index on my STEP webpage. And feel free to stay in touch!

Blessings to all ~  
Patricia Dines

■ **Find medical professionals** who can test your body for toxics and help professionally remove them.

■ **Look for ways to include toxics reduction in our collective health conversation.** You could, for instance, stand up for protective regulations; encourage toxics training for all doctors; join related nonprofits; and advise toxics exposure reduction as a way to reduce our national health care costs. It's better for us all if we can reduce costs not by pinching pennies but by truly avoiding disease.

### Resources: Health & Toxics

Here are two resources I've found recently that can help in this cause.

■ **BOOK. *A New War on Cancer: The Unlikely Heroes Revolutionizing Prevention***, by Kristina Marusic. This book's description notes that we've been waging war on cancer for over fifty years, and yet "cancer still claims the lives of one in five men and one in six women in the US." And it says that **"up to two-thirds of all cancer cases are linked to preventable environmental causes.** If we can stop cancer before it begins, why don't we?"

The author tells the stories of doctors, scientists, and researchers who are seeking to transform how we address cancer. The book's description says that these experts "recognize that **we will never reduce cancer rates**

See *Health*, over

## The Dangers of Drain Cleaners

If you have a drain clog in your sink, shower, or toilet — it might seem easy to just grab a strong chemical drain cleaner, with its claims to clear pipes quickly.

However, these products can be highly toxic — one of the most dangerous products we might have in our homes. And they're not even always the most effective approach!

So be sure to understand the risks of any product you're considering, and try less-toxic options first. If you want to use a chemical cleaner, find a less-toxic one, and fully follow the directions, including wearing protective gear and keeping it out of the reach of children and pets.

### Drain Cleaner Risks

■ **Harm to home.** The harsh caustic chemicals in some drain cleaners can corrode pipes, eat pipe glue, risk cracking toilets, and potentially lead to leaks and bursting pipes. The risks increase with older pipes and/or repeated use.

■ **Harm to health.** Chemicals in these products risk modest to serious harm to users' eyes, lungs, skin, and beyond — including permanent scarring. And, if the clog remains, it can risk harm to anyone who works on it next. Some plumbers will refuse to do so!

■ **Might not address the underlying issue,** such as a broken pipe or larger blockage like a tree root.

### 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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Printed on recycled paper.

### Drain Cleaning Alternatives

■ **Plunger.** A 2006 Consumer Reports study found that mechanical methods like plungers were more effective than any chemical drain cleaner they tested. Ideally use flat plungers for sinks and tubs, and rounded ones for toilets. Cover overflow holes in a tub or sink with duct tape or a rag.

■ **Hair snake.** An easy inexpensive plastic device to remove hair from drain. Look for a sturdy one.

■ **Baking soda then vinegar in the drain.** Let bubble for 15 minutes or overnight. Flush with hot water. Don't use boiling water, as it can damage pipes and toilets.

■ **Hot water then dish detergent,** for kitchen fat-based clogs.

■ **Biological drain cleaner.** These use enzymes or bacteria to clear organic waste materials such as hair and food. They can take longer to work, but be more safe and effective. Plus the materials can coat the inside of your pipes and multiply, helping avoid future blockages. (More information at [www.bit.ly/3pjBeRd](http://www.bit.ly/3pjBeRd).)

■ **Clear the p-trap under your sink.** This is the U-shaped part of the pipe. Get instructions online.

■ **Hire a plumber** — to evaluate and address the underlying cause, and perhaps clear pipes using less-toxic approaches such as high-pressure water or a plumbing snake.

### Clog Prevention

■ **Put hair traps** in shower drains.

■ **Don't pour cooking oil or grease down the drain.** It can harden in the pipe. Instead pour it into a container and/or wipe your pan with a paper towel.

■ **Only put toilet paper in toilets.** It's designed to come apart, versus facial tissues which are designed to stay together with moisture. Also don't flush your floss!

For more information, see the sources below.

**SOURCES:** [www.poisson.org/articles/whats-in-drain-cleaner](http://www.poisson.org/articles/whats-in-drain-cleaner) • [www.housedigest.com/485698/the-dangerous-truth-you-need-to-know-about-chemical-drain-cleaners](http://www.housedigest.com/485698/the-dangerous-truth-you-need-to-know-about-chemical-drain-cleaners) • [www.bit.ly/43P8zLU](http://www.bit.ly/43P8zLU) • [www.bit.ly/46fdkXY](http://www.bit.ly/46fdkXY)

*Health, continued*

**without ridding our lives of the chemicals that increasingly trigger this deadly disease.... The war on cancer is winnable — if we revolutionize the way we fight."**

■ **WEBSITE. "What You Know Can Help You — An Introduction to Toxic Substances."** This site walks you through how you can be exposed, the common kinds of acute (immediate) and long-term impacts, and what you can do about it. [www.health.ny.gov/environmental/chemicals/toxic\\_substances.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/chemicals/toxic_substances.htm)

### Key Facts

■ **Half of American men and one in three women** will get a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime.

■ **One in 285 American children receives a cancer diagnosis** before the age of 20, with rates increasing steadily over the last 50 years.

■ **From 1975 to 2019, the number of new cancer cases per 100,000 Americans (the incidence rate) increased for multiple cancers.** Rates of multiple myeloma rose by 46%, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma by 76%, testicular cancer by 70%, childhood leukemia by 35%, and childhood brain cancer 33%.

According to expert Phil Landrigan, "These increases are far too rapid to be of genetic origin. They cannot be explained by better diagnosis. **The explanation for the increasing incidence of cancer lies in our world of chemicals.**"

STATISTICS FROM: *A New War on Cancer*.

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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! •  
• Plus you and others can get on •  
• our low-volume email list, to hear •  
• when new issues are online. •  
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