Peroxide Deodorizer

In a recent conversation with Sebastopol’s Ryn Longmaid, she enthusiastically told me about her favorite deodorizing tool: hydrogen peroxide. Inexpensive and easily found in drugstores and beyond (in the familiar brown bottle), hydrogen peroxide is simply diluted $H_2O_2$, or water with an extra oxygen atom.

Ryn says that she’s delighted with how well hydrogen peroxide cleans and removes smells from her water bottles and coffee travel cups. She just pours in a little $H_2O_2$, adds water, then swishes or lets it soak. This easily eliminates odors, she reports, without leaving behind its own smell or taste. This method works better for her than soap (which doesn’t eliminate the smells), vinegar (which leaves behind its own taste and scent), and the hassle of boiling bottles.

Ryn also uses hydrogen peroxide in her laundry, tossing a big capful in with each load to remove stains and smells. She finds that it’s even effective at deodorizing her husband’s hockey gear!

To make $H_2O_2$ easier to use, Ryn pours it into tall squeeze bottles (such as those used for ketchup and mustard), which she keeps handy in her bathroom and kitchen.

Hydrogen peroxide also has various other household uses, including my personal favorite: cleaning minor cuts and abrasions. (The bubbling is the extra oxygen atoms breaking free!)

Online fans tout various other applications, including using it as a replacement for toxic chlorine bleach in cleaning mold and disinfecting cutting boards. Folks also use it as a mouthwash, toothbrush sanitizer, plant fertilizer — even to remove skunk odor (mixed with baking soda and hand soap).

Thankfully, I haven’t had to try that last one yet, though it’s good to know, just in case....

For more uses, see www.using-hydrogen-peroxide.com.
Be Safe With Rat Poison

I recently received a letter from Karen Clyde of Sebastopol, urging us to write about the “dangers of rat poison to our domestic pets, as well as birds and fish.”

She says, “Our 2-year-old cat Panda is recovering (and not yet out of the woods) from ingesting rat poison. A neighbor put ‘a little bit’ out in an obscure corner of her yard. Panda just barely escaped death. One blood transfusion, numerous tests, vitamin K, and $800 later, we are [still] nursing her back to health.”

Karen wants people to know that even a small amount of rat poison can be highly toxic to curious pets, wildlife, and children. Also, if a poisoned rat is eaten by another animal, it too will be consuming that poison. Thousands of wildlife deaths annually are estimated to be caused this way — killing the hawks, owls, and other animals that otherwise control rodents naturally.

So, what are you to do if you have a rodent problem? As usual, we advise looking first for less-toxic solutions. You’ll reduce the harm to “non-target” species, including pets and children, as well as avoid the risk of mice and rats dying behind walls and leaving an unreachable stench.

In TNS VII/3, I described various alternative approaches to managing mice. (Download the article from our Online Index, under Mice.) Simple solutions include keeping a “mouser” cat and using Havahart traps, which catch animals alive for later release. Look for these traps, sized for various animals, at local stores or www.havahart.com. (Note: Even snap traps, though I really don’t like them, are preferable to poison.)

You can also often prevent rodents from entering your home, for instance by blocking their entrance point(s) and storing your food in secure containers. A professional can help with rodent-proofing; look for one committed to less-toxic options.

For a systematic methodology to identify less-toxic approaches for a wide variety of pests, read about the Integrated Pest Management process in TNS II/6 (see Index under IPM).

If you’ve explored less-toxic solutions and are considering a rodent control product, please read labels to understand risks and identify less-toxic options. More tips about this are in TNS V/4 (in the Index, under Pesticides, Assessing).

And, if you do end up using a toxic product, Karen asks that you make it inaccessible to animals. One solution is a tamper-proof bait station, which allows rodents in but keeps children and pets out. See one option at www.e-bug.net/cgi-bin/store/commerce.cgi?product=Baits#cmousestation. Note: Although this is an improvement, there’s still a risk that rats will drop the toxins outside for others to find, or eat them and become a poisonous meal for another creature.

Karen ends her note, “Thanks for what you do with your newsletter.” That’s always nice to hear, and we’re glad to be of service. And thank you for sharing your experience with us. We encourage others to do the same!

~ Patricia Dines

TSCA, continued

the rising rates of birth defects, asthma, neuro-developmental disorders, and other major diseases harming children in the U.S. and beyond. Additional health problems linked to everyday chemicals include breast and brain cancer, lowered sperm counts, early puberty, diabetes, attention deficit disorder, and autism.

These illnesses aren’t just costing us emotionally. Landrigan estimates that chronic childhood diseases tied to toxic exposure are costing the U.S. $55 billion a year.

Still, for thousands of chemicals, toxicity information isn’t publicly available, even as tests consistently find these materials in our bodies.

Landrigan concludes that, “The environment is a powerful determinant of human health,” and children are especially vulnerable.

The Emerging Solution

That’s why many public health advocates were delighted this September to hear EPA administrator Lisa Jackson declare that overhauling TSCA is one of her top priorities.

Most observers agree that TSCA, the 1976 law intended to regulate everyday chemicals, has been stunningly ineffective. Since it was passed 33 years ago, the EPA has only required testing of about 200 chemicals, while over 80,000 chemicals are currently being used in commerce.

Legislation to reform TSCA is expected to finally be introduced in Congress this fall. Jackson has outlined the principles she’d like to see reflected there, including: better standards to protect health and the environment; improved data from manufacturers; special consideration of vulnerable populations, especially children; encouragement of green chemistry’s safer chemicals; fulfillment of the public’s right to know; and EPA authority for timely action.

For more about how you can support truly protective reforms, see www.saferchemicals.org, www.healthystuff.org, www.ewg.org (under Toxics), and www.epa.gov/oppt.

~ Patricia Dines