

THE NEXT STEP

Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Beliefs That Can Block Toxics Reduction

Over my years seeking to help reduce our exposure to everyday toxics, I've noticed some common beliefs that can block people from even considering that a product or material might be toxic and harmful.

These beliefs can be operating, for instance, when people buy or use a product, hire a worker, remodel their home or business, or respond to someone else's concerns.

Of course, it's appropriate to evaluate if a concern is reasonable before acting on it. But these beliefs can stop people from even looking at all.

Do you recognize any of these in yourself or others?

BELIEF: If it's for sale, it must be safe

EVALUATION: Unfortunately, this is just not true. Toxic products have remained in stores for years despite notable evidence of harm. Plus many toxic products are allowed on shelves only because they include warning labels and use requirements.

That's why reading label warnings is so key for buying products wisely and using them safely. Choose the least-toxic solution, then follow the directions, including for protective gear, and teach your children

to do the same. **Also, the label doesn't show all**

the hazards, so pursue and be open to other sources of information.

BELIEF: This product's toxicity is not a big deal (aka "Don't worry your pretty little head about it")

EVALUATION: If this conclusion is made by an appropriate independent expert, with supporting evidence, this might have value. Unfortunately, though, it's often said with scant evidence by vendors wanting to make a sale or product users seeking to brush aside concerns.

BELIEF: If you're concerned or impacted, you're too sensitive (aka "You need to man up!")

EVALUATION: On the contrary, I think that it's an excellent survival skill to be aware of threats to our health. Those who recognize or experience toxic risks early are first responders who offer warning signs for others — the proverbial canaries in the coal mine.

That's because people can be at risk even if they don't see the risk, notice the symptoms, or connect symptoms to a specific exposure. How many people have a headache and pop a pill without considering the pain's source? Worse, someone's first symptom can be a serious one! **And allowing exposure to continue can encourage long-term systemic disease.**

The evidence linking toxics to disease is strong. It breaks my heart to consider how much illness could be lessened and avoided just by lowering our toxic exposures. This in turn would reduce the suffering and

We Want to Know!

We invite all folks who live in the City of Sebastopol to respond to our quick online outreach survey!

It's easy, confidential, takes only 5 minutes — and is vital to help us do some current outreach planning.

Please check it out, if you haven't yet — and help us spread the word! It's at www.healthyworld.org/ES.html. There's also an email option there.

Thank you!

health care costs for so many people. **Isn't it better to be alerted and avoid early?**

BELIEF: I can use whatever products I want

EVALUATION: Well, there are legal limits. Plus I think it's wise to balance freedom with safety and responsibility. That's how we can protect ourselves, as well as our loved ones, animals, land, and community members. And folks using and living near toxics are often the most impacted. So someone's rebelliousness might hurt them first! Also, if others are harmed by these toxics, it's reasonable for them to object.

BELIEF: Toxics are everywhere, so a little more doesn't matter (said with a powerless shrug)

EVALUATION: Just because toxics are common in this culture, doesn't mean that levels are the same everywhere or that we can't protect ourselves better in the places we spend our lives. Let's not be talked out of our power, rights, and choices. Do we really just want to accept being poisoned against our will — without even trying to protect ourselves a little bit? Do we want it to keep getting worse? Wouldn't we rather live in a healthier world? **Let's look for ways to turn the dial safer!**

For more about how to avoid toxic harm, see your topics of interest in our STEP Online Index (over).

~ Patricia Dines



Detoxing Details

■ **Removing stains from your teacups.** Are you annoyed by stains in your coffee or tea cups, but don't want to resort to bleaching them?

Thankfully, the less-toxic remedies are quick and easy. Just put Bon Ami non-chlorine powder and water on the scrubber side of a sponge and scrub the stain area. It should come off quickly. If you need a little more power, use Bar Keepers Friend powder. Rinse well. Ta-dah!

■ **Skipping toxic chalk.** Perhaps you've heard of the magic "Chinese" chalk, sold in out-of-the-way spots and said to keep ants from crossing the line. The problem is that this black market item's claims and safety are not regulated, and it can contain toxics that risk health and environmental harm. Worse, children can eat and play with it! All that's just not needed when non-toxic methods work great. See my systematic method in our STEP Online Index under **Ants**, XVII/1.

■ **Avoiding other illegal toxic products.** You can also be at risk from illegal and fake antibacterial cleansers, flea and tick repellents for pets, mothballs, and more.

To protect yourself, check that pesticide labels list the active ingredients; this is required. Most will also say "EPA Reg. No." with an EPA registration number. (Some minimum risk ones are exempt from that one.)

For more information, see www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/avoid-illegal-household-pesticide-products and www.epa.gov/minimum-risk-pesticides/active-ingredients-eligible-minimum-risk-pesticide-products. More on this topic is under **Assessing Toxics** in our Index.

■ Is it a pesticide or an herbicide?

People often get confused with this terminology. To clarify, a **pesticide** is any material used to kill something we consider a pest (pest + "cide," meaning "to kill"). This is an umbrella term that includes **herbicides** (to kill plants), **insecticides** (to kill insects), **rodenticides** (to kill rodents), **fungicides** (to kill fungus), etc. For more information, see www.npic.orst.edu/ingred/ptype/index.html.

■ Keep the emergency Poison Help Line number handy, 800/222-1222.

This toll-free national number connects you to your local poison center and a specially-trained medical professional. Interpretation is available in 161 languages. Often you can get the help you need just over the phone. (If someone is unconscious or has trouble breathing, call 911.)

This free program, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, also seeks to prevent poisonings through education and develop uniform poison treatment recommendations. www.poisonhelp.hrsa.gov/the-poison-help-line

■ Community action progress.

In 2017, the family of a 31-year-old man (Drew Wynne) was horrified when he collapsed and died after using a paint stripper to refinish a floor, despite wearing a respirator. The coroner's autopsy report found that toxic methylene chloride fumes from the paint stripper were to blame.

Such paint strippers have been linked to more than 60 preventable deaths across the U.S. since 1980, including at least four in the past year, but they remain on shelves. Long-term exposure to them has been linked to lung and liver cancer, plus harm to neurological and reproductive systems. They've been

Local Toxics Disposal

■ The next Sebastopol Toxics Collections Day is July 31, from 4 to 8pm.

To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event.

Note: This is the last Sebastopol one this year. But they're in other local towns every Tuesday. You can also drop items at the Household Toxics Facility.

■ **For more about local toxics disposal,** see www.recyclenow.org or call 707/565-3375.

banned in Europe. And the U.S. EPA had proposed removing them from retail stores, after determining that they posed an "unreasonable risk" that revised labeling couldn't resolve. However, late last year the EPA postponed that ban indefinitely.

So people acted, creating a petition campaign calling on Lowe's to stop selling these products. It was signed by over 200,000 people, and Lowe's has finally said that it will phase out these products by the end of 2018. Various nonprofits and the Wynne family are calling on other retailers to do the same — and on Congress and the EPA to ban these products entirely from store shelves.

SOURCES: www.saferchemicals.org/newsroom/statement-on-lowes-commitment-to-ban-deadly-paint-strippers • www.cbsnews.com/news/dangerous-paint-stripper-chemical-methylene-chloride-ban-on-hold

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 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/STEPIndex.html