



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Safer Holiday Candles

As the holidays near and days shorten, we often light candles to set a cozy, relaxing, or festive mood.

Unfortunately, though, these candles might be emitting materials that risk the health of ourselves, our families, and our guests. (Similar cautions apply to other scent products, including sprays and plug-ins.)

The Risks

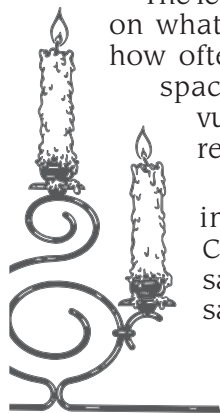
Over the years, various studies, experts, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have brought forward evidence that mainstream candles can put toxics into our air.

This is confirmed by people's repeated reports that candles can bring on headaches, congested sinuses, tearful eyes, and allergic reactions when burned — and even unlit. And that these problems disappear when these candles are removed.

Researchers are also concerned about long-term harm, such as cancer and damage to the lungs, brain, and nervous system. Plus candles' black soot can damage ceilings, computers, and electrical appliances.

The level of harm depends on what candles are used, how often, in how small a space — plus people's vulnerability and current health issues.

And, not surprisingly, The National Candle Association says that candles are safe for our health.



Materials of Concern

■ **Paraffin wax.** Most mainstream candles are made with this petroleum product. When burned, these candles have been shown to emit toxic chemicals like toluene and benzene.

■ **Metal in wicks.** Using candle wicks with zinc or tin cores can release heavy metals into the air. Lead cores were banned in the U.S. in 2003, but cheap candles from other countries might still have them.

■ **Synthetic scents and colors.** Though scents in products are often marketed as natural, most are actually synthetic chemicals that can cause health issues — from headaches and dizziness, to asthma and even cancer. (For more about this, see the STEP Index under **Perfumes (IV/6).**)

Choosing Better Candles

Give yourself and others safer scents to breathe deep. Look for:

1) "100%" beeswax, soy, or vegetable oil. Get 100%. Even those labeled as just "pure" can be a blend with paraffin! **Beeswax** burns cleaner and longer, doesn't drip, has a naturally sweet scent, and comes in tapers, pillars, votives, tea lights, birthday candles — even Hanukkah candles! You can also buy beeswax sheets and roll your own candles, or melt beeswax granules into glass jars. **Soy** is softer, so "100%" most likely comes in containers and tea lights. Be sure it says that no toxic chemicals were added. Perhaps also look for non-GMO or organic soy.

2) "100%" non-metal wicks, such as cotton, paper, or wood. (Check your current candles with

Local Toxics Disposal

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collections Day is Jan. 8,** from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event. 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.

the steps at www.greenamerica.org/toxiccandles.)

3) All natural essential oils (distilled from plants). These come in a wide range of pleasing, refreshing, and evocative scents.

4) Non-toxic natural dyes.

Other Healthier Approaches

You can also bring light and scents into your home with: healthier air freshener sprays, simmering aromatic spices on the stove, diffusers, lamp rings, and battery operated candles (some look pretty realistic!). See the STEP Index under **Air Fresheners (VII/2).**

For additional seasonal tips, look in the STEP Index under **Holidays.**

Article sources and more information are at www.healthyworld.org/candles.html.

STEP Updates

■ **It was so much fun tabling for STEP at the Sept. 30 Wellness Fair** (next to the Sebastopol Farmers' Market). I shared flyers and free sample issues with people who were delighted to discover this unique, helpful, and free resource!

■ **I've created a new shorter web link for STEP — www.healthyworld.org/STEP.** Much easier to remember! From there, you can connect to our existing webpages and look for answers to your specific questions about everyday toxics and alternatives. It's also a simpler way to share this information with others.

~ Patricia Dines

