



# THE NEXT STEP

*Toward a Healthier Future*

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Children & Pesticide Exposure at School

In September 2000, California passed the **Healthy Schools Act**, requiring public schools to inform parents about the use of toxic pesticides that might harm their children's health. The Act, which went into effect January 2001, also encouraged schools to develop and implement plans to reduce pesticide use.

A recent report on the implementation of this Act shows that some schools have significantly improved their pest management practices while others are still using very toxic pesticides. It also found that some schools have not fully implemented the law, for instance failing to inform parents of pesticide use or not making that information easily available.

Children can be exposed to toxic pesticides at school in many ways – on lawns, pathways, playgrounds, sports fields, and inside buildings. Intended to kill weeds, insects, and other pests, these pesticides can also harm children's developing neurological, reproductive, and immune systems, and increase their chances of getting cancer. Children have been shown to be even more affected by pesticides than adults, because they play on the ground and put things in

their mouths; eat more food, drink more fluids, and breathe more air in proportion to their body weight than adults; and have immune systems that are not yet fully developed.

Often this risk to children is just not necessary, when less-toxic approaches can be as effective (or even better), often at a reasonable cost.



**So what pesticides are currently being used at your child's school?** The Healthy Schools Act helps you find out – and helps you encourage your school to choose less-toxic practices. If you haven't received notification from your school about their planned pesticide use, call and ask their plans for implementing this law. It's important that schools know that this is important to parents.

If your school indicates that it's planning to use toxic pesticides, the law specifies that you can ask to be notified before each application. It also requires schools to post warning signs before and after application, and to keep track of all pesticides used, making that information available to the public upon request.

You can also ask the school if they plan to develop a strong Integrated

Pest Management (IPM) program that prioritizes children's health. Oakland Unified, San Francisco Unified, and Los Angeles Unified school districts have all passed strong IPM policies.

A good IPM program will systematically analyze pest problems; start with less-toxic alternatives; and only use a more toxic solution if the potential benefit is worth the additional health risk to everyone at the school. Even schools committed to avoiding toxic pesticides benefit from having an IPM program that spells out how they will respond to pest problems.

Another way you can help reduce children's exposure to toxics is to urge state policymakers to ban the use of highly toxic pesticides in California schools and other sites where children are likely to face exposure.

Says Martha Dina Arquello, Environmental Health Coordinator at Physicians for Social Responsibility in Los Angeles, "Alternatives to toxic pesticides work – we know this from experience in some of the state's largest school districts. It's time for school officials to get serious, pass strong IPM policies and stop using pesticides around children."

To get a copy of the report, *Learning Curve: Charting Progress on Pesticide Use and the Healthy Schools Act*, see <[www.CalHealthySchools.org](http://www.CalHealthySchools.org)> or call (888) CPR-4880. The report and website include background information and support for actions you can take.

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) website also has information for parents and schools about implementing the Act, including information about alternatives. Go to <[www.cdpr.ca.gov/cfdocs/apps/schoolipm/main.cfm](http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/cfdocs/apps/schoolipm/main.cfm)>.

There's good news for parents and children in the **Sebastopol Union School District**, which includes Brook Haven, Park Side, and Pine Crest Schools. The District chose to stop using all synthetic pesticides at the same time the City did in 2000. They're in the process of implementing other aspects of the Act. **Parents at other schools** who don't receive notification about their school's plans under the Act can contact their school for more information.

~ Patricia Dines

**STEP is a project of the City of Sebastopol**, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **You can help make STEP possible!** Write an article, share your success story, or be a liaison to businesses or schools. Together we can support our community's conversion to less-toxic alternatives! To find out more, call 829-2999.

## Got Mosquitoes?

All my life I've been the first person on the hike, at the campsite, on the deck, or anywhere else to get bitten by mosquitoes. I've used most of the common home remedies, and most of the commercial toxic ones too. But still, these bugs want my blood.

Recently I came upon an article saying you can simply rub some **fresh catnip leaves** on your skin, and mosquitoes will be repelled. On a whim, but without real hope, I tried it – and so far it's worked! It's also worked with three "test subjects" on our deck.

I can't understand why so many of us have been struggling with citronella smoke and other ineffective substances for so many years, when this works so well!

In fact, I've since found out that researchers at Iowa State University have been investigating using catnip essential oil to repel mosquitoes. They reported at the 2001 annual meeting of the American Chemical Society that nepetalactone (one of catnip's essential oils) is about 10 times more effective than DEET, the toxic compound used in most commercial insect repellants. They also



found that this essential oil repels cockroaches.

These results were based on laboratory testing; formal human or animal testing hasn't been done, so you'll need to play around to find the right dose for you. The fresh plant is safest. If you use the essential oil, be sure to dilute it in a carrier oil before applying to your skin.

If anyone knows of any problems with catnip as a mosquito repellent, please let me know. (Folks do joke about the idea of becoming a cat magnet, but if that's a problem, I'd simply give your cat its own pile of leaves.)

Make sure your catnip plant is organic, and plant plenty so as not to run out!

~ Rebecca Dwan

**More about catnip:** Catnip (*nepeta cataria*) is a cooling, astringent, bitter member of the mint family and has also been used to lower fevers, calm upset stomachs, soothe the nervous system, relax spasms, support sleep, and help colds and flu. The plants make a pretty, easy-to-grow border, loved by bees. However, when you first plant them, keep an eye out – you might need to protect them from the local cats!

~ Patricia Dines

**SOURCES:** *Environment News Service* (<http://ens.lycos.com>), *The New Age Herbalist* (Richard Mabey), *The MacMillan Treasury of Herbs* (Ann Bonar), and *The Encyclopedia of Herbs and Their Uses* (Deni Bown).

### ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP is published six times a year for Sebastopol residents by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program** (STEP).

**STEP's mission** is to support Sebastopol citizens in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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### Help Beautify Sebastopol!

Join Planting Earth Activation (PEA) in re-landscaping and beautifying Sebastopol! Their next volunteer days are **Sun. Sept. 8, Sun. Oct. 6, and Sun. Nov 3**, from 12-4pm. Meet at the movie theatre parking lot, across the street from the police station. Bring water to drink plus tools and a wheelbarrow if you have them. See you there!

## Our Bodies' Toxic Load

In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began a study to calculate the public's exposure to environmental contaminants, including certain pesticides. Using blood and urine samples, scientists can monitor the population's contact with chemicals in the air, water, dust, food, and soil.

So far, the results "confirm what many people already suspected," says Susan Kegley, staff scientist at Pesticide Action Network (PANNA). "The general population has contaminant levels exceeding those set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as safe."

Sources of exposure for the general population include: use of home and garden pesticides; residues on food; laundry and household cleaning products; spray drift from nearby farms or homes; and use in businesses and public buildings such as schools.

According to Coming Clean, a community network in Montana, scientists estimate that everyone alive today carries within their body at least 700 contaminants, most of which have not been fully characterized. This is true whether we live in a rural or isolated area, because so many chemicals are being used and they can travel long distances in a short amount of time. Says Coming Clean, "Wherever we live, we all live in a chemically contaminated neighborhood." Approximately 80,000 chemicals are registered with the United States government, most of which have not been tested for health and environmental effects.

For more about this chemical body burden and the wide range of health problems it can cause, see <[www.chemicalbodyburden.org](http://www.chemicalbodyburden.org)>.

**SOURCES:** "Getting on Our Nerves", Diane Marty, *E Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2002, p. 40; *Coming Clean* <[www.chemicalbodyburden.org](http://www.chemicalbodyburden.org)>.