



# THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

## How to Create a Healthier Life & World

One theme I've often woven into this newsletter is that **reducing our personal toxic exposure requires that we take action at both the individual and community levels.**

**So, yes, we make a big difference** when we reduce the toxics in our homes, food, water, beverages ... because these are likely to be our longest and most intimate exposures. Plus these exposures are often easier to reduce, because we can have more control or choice over them.

And yet, this action is not sufficient. **Community-level action is also vital to protect ourselves** ... and our families, pets, water supplies, natural areas, and wildlife.

Because, unfortunately, **a wide range of toxics are regularly being put into our earth, air, water, consumer products, and more.** These in turn are known to harm people, natural ecosystems, and creatures ... including us! **Individual action alone can't remove all of these dispersed toxics.**

The good news is that, **when we join together, we can often better protect ourselves and our world ... and with a much more efficient use of our energy.** And, by addressing toxics at their sources, we can



reduce our toxic risk from our everyday activities ... without the burden of individually evaluating that toxicity!

**So how do we take meaningful community action?** Here's an approach that I developed over the years to support people in finding a path that meets their life and style.

### Creating a Path That Works for You

**1) See the many people who are working diligently for a better world.** If you get discouraged, look for them and be inspired! Don't let the harm define your reality.

**2) Write a list of the issues that concern or annoy you the most.** Where would you be delighted to see positive change happen? Knowing what issues matter most to you can inspire you to act, help you be more efficient in the actions you do take, and lead you to be happier about what you're supporting in the world.

**3) Look for groups taking action on these issues that concern you the most.** Many can be found just by searching online. So, for example, in the toxics domain, you might decide to look for groups working for local or national change; reducing toxics in home products; helping protect children at school; or addressing toxics' harm to our health.

**4) Identify the group(s) that most resonate with your preferred approach.** Do you like their style and tone? Are they working in ways that appeal to you? Do you think that their focus is smart and effective?

## Local Toxics Disposal

■ **To discard your household toxics safely, bring them to the Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility.** It's at 500 Mecham Road, between Cotati and Petaluma, and is open Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 7:30am to 2:30pm.

■ **Check the Zero Waste Sonoma website** ([www.zerowastesonoma.gov](http://www.zerowastesonoma.gov)) for more information on this, or to see what city HHW Collection Events are currently scheduled. Or call 707/565-3375.

**5) Identify how these group(s) invite participation to see how you want to help. For instance, you might:** Peruse their website's current action alerts, get on their email action alerts list, Like their Facebook page, or donate time or money.

**6) Decide to spend time and/or money doing this. Even a small amount helps!** These groups are acting for our well-being. Just a little support can cheer them on, amplify their efforts, allow them to keep working, and increase their effectiveness! And it'll help you feel better, because you're supporting your health and a better future for us all.

**7) Enjoy watching the impact we can have when we act wisely together.** We don't have to be powerless to harm. So much that is good in the world is because people joined together to shape something better. I truly find it so satisfying to be part of that, for so many reasons.

Yes, indeed...

**"Action is the  
antidote to despair."  
(Attributed to Joan Baez)**

**For more of my ideas about taking effective action,** see my articles on that topic at [www.askecogirl.info/AEThemeTakingAction.html](http://www.askecogirl.info/AEThemeTakingAction.html).

**The STEP Online Index (see over) can also show you** common toxics issues, useful groups, and action ideas. And see my continued exploration of this topic on the other side of this page!

## Exploring Groups & Actions to Support

So let's look at how easy it can be to find groups doing good work in the world. These are some of my favorite nonprofits for my interests; you might want to support them too. And this is just a taste of the wonderful groups acting for our shared well-being — including probably on the topics that concern you most.

**1) Breast Cancer Prevention Partners (BCPP)**, [www.bcpp.org](http://www.bcpp.org). This San Francisco nonprofit, celebrating over 25 years, "is a science-based advocacy organization that works to prevent breast cancer by eliminating our exposure to toxic chemicals and radiation." Or, as its slogan says — **"Exposing the cause is the cure."**

On BCPP's website, you can find lists of toxic products to avoid, useful research on common consumer toxics, and information on the group's policy projects.

Plus its Take Action page includes quick links to send pre-written messages to your representatives. For example, you can easily click to ask that your representatives:

■ **Support the California Toxic-Free Cosmetics Act** (AB 2762). This would ban 12 toxic chemicals (some of the most toxic on the planet) from cosmetics sold in California.

■ **Vote Yes on the California Cosmetic Fragrance and Flavor Right to Know Act** (SB 312). This

pioneering bill would require public disclosure of toxic fragrance and flavor chemicals hiding in beauty and personal care products sold in California. This would make it easier for us to choose safer products!

■ **Pass the California PFAS-Free Firefighting Foam Act** (SB 1044). This would protect firefighters (and all of us) from firefighting foams containing toxic PFAS chemicals (see box) — and move us to more safe, effective, and affordable alternatives.

**2) The Environmental Working Group (EWG)**, [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org). This nonprofit does extensive research on the health and environmental impact of a wide range of consumer products. Then it presents this information in useful ways that support us in taking effective action as consumers and citizens.

On its website, you can choose Consumer Guides, Research, News, and Support Our Work. I often refer readers to EWG's helpful consumer product guides!

Its Key Issues page includes links for topics such as Toxics, PFAS Chemicals, Farming, Food, Water, Cosmetics, and Children's Health. From there, you can read their summaries, news, and actions.

So, for instance, under PFAS chemicals are various news and information links. (Aha! That gives me added information for my PFAS box, and to support the BCPP action above!)

**3) The Sierra Club**, [www.sierraclub.org/toxics](http://www.sierraclub.org/toxics). One of our nation's oldest and largest eco-nonprofits, the Sierra Club has a Toxics and Health program that works to address toxic pollution. The above page has easy actions for you. And one of its sub-topics is PFAS chemicals!

**4) Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families (SCHF)**, [www.saferchemicals.org](http://www.saferchemicals.org). I love that this nonprofit has gathered together a wide range of organizations under one coalition umbrella — including groups focused on health, the environment, environmental justice, parenting, and business. What a great way to join our power and interests together! SCHF has a number of easy actions and helpful reports on its website, plus information on its policy work.

### What Are PFAS Chemicals?

PFASs (perfluorinated alkylated substances) are a group of nearly 5,000 chemicals that are widely used in consumer products for their nonstick and waterproof properties. They can be used as coatings, polishes, paints, and stain repellants on cookware, carpets, clothes, leather, textiles, paper, rubber, and plastics.

Unfortunately, these substances have **widely contaminated** U.S. drinking water, rain water, food ... and even us! Tests find them in nearly *everyone's* bodies.

**These "forever" chemicals never break down, and have been linked to many health problems**, including breast, kidney, and testicular cancer; hormone disruption; liver damage; thyroid disease; and birth defects. They can be harmful at extremely low levels.

A recent study, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Chemosphere*, found that attempting to discard PFAS chemicals by burning, landfilling, or wastewater treatment doesn't effectively contain or destroy them. So they (or their byproducts) just end up in our environment, contaminating our lives even further.

Thus, it concludes, **addressing the PFAS problem must start by limiting their use** to only the most essential applications.

*SOURCES:* [www.ewg.org/release/study-disposal-pfas-waste-increases-contamination](http://www.ewg.org/release/study-disposal-pfas-waste-increases-contamination) • [www.ewg.org/release/study-all-pfas-pose-risk-public-health-should-be-treated-class](http://www.ewg.org/release/study-all-pfas-pose-risk-public-health-should-be-treated-class)

### 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'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!  
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