



Protecting Our Health and Environment

ReNews

YOUR NEWS AND INFORMATION SOURCE ABOUT • RECYCLING • POLLUTION PREVENTION • LESS TOXIC PRODUCTS

Spring 2004

Earth Day Issue

Choose Less Toxic Alternatives

Baking Soda, Borax

Baking soda can be used as a mild abrasive cleaner. Borax can be used as a general purpose cleaner. They are an alternative to chlorine or silica-based scouring products, which can have harmful effects on humans and animals.

d-Limonene

d-Limonene is derived from citrus plants. This chemical is the active ingredient in citrus-based solvents and general household cleaners. It is an effective alternative to petroleum-based solvents and cleaners, which can pollute the air and water.

Hydrogen Peroxide

Hydrogen Peroxide is used as a general purpose cleaner and bleach. It is considered to be an effective alternative to chlorine based compounds.

Trisodium Phosphate (TSP)

Trisodium Phosphate (TSP) is used as a general purpose cleaner and degreaser, and can substitute for other all-purpose cleaners. Published research regarding the effectiveness of TSP is not available. However, anecdotal information from people who have used TSP over the years indicate that it is very effective.

Vinegar

Vinegar is used as a general purpose cleaner, hard surface cleaner, and glass cleaner. It is an alternative to ammonia-based cleaners and other corrosive products.

The complete study is on the Web at www.greenconsumer.cc

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

Companies that manufacture household cleaners and pest control products have produced clever marketing strategies to portray house cleaning and pest control as a "war". Pests, dust, germs and grime are the "enemy" that you, the consumer, have to battle. Although having a clean home is important, it is also important that

EPA with no health and safety data.² When chemicals are studied, they may not be studied in combination, which could have an additive or synergistic effect on human health and the environment. Tests that are performed are often paid for by the company that manufactures the product; therefore, no objective review is done.

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consumers take a critical look at the products they are using and how they affect their health and the health of the environment.

Almost every year, U.S. officials ban several chemicals to better protect health or environmental quality, while several thousand new chemicals are introduced to international commerce. There is little if any understanding of the potential health threats of these new chemicals.¹ The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the federal agency that regulates chemicals and is charged with keeping citizens and the environment safe. Consumers should know that chemical companies are not required to tell EPA how their compounds are used or monitor where their products might finally end up in the environment. There is no law that requires chemical companies to conduct basic health and safety testing of their products either before or after they are commercialized. Eighty percent of all applications to produce a new chemical are approved by the U.S.

Most consumers are unaware that the chemicals they buy may not have been tested. Many of us trust that if it is for sale on the shelf, it can't kill me. Label warnings such as "poison", "danger", "warning" and "caution" on packages are useful for acute toxicity (immediate) but do not take into account the chronic (long-term) exposures to chemical products. Product testing often does not take into consideration the effect on an adult versus a child or an animal who may be much closer to the source or residue and who has a lower body weight and less developed system.

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Not All Salmon are Created Equal: The Farmed vs. Wild Debate

If you enjoy eating salmon, you may have noticed recently little signs saying, “farm raised” hovering over your fillet at the supermarket. Or maybe the “color added” sticker on the package is catching your attention. If you’re confused about the difference between “farmed” vs. “wild caught” salmon and wondering, “Why should I care?” Read on...

Farmed salmon require chemical inputs and affect water quality in ways that wild salmon do not. Farmed salmon are contained, raised and fed in high-density net cages suspended in the ocean. The crowded pens make salmon more susceptible to disease and in order to counter this antibiotics, vaccines, and other chemicals are given to farmed salmon. These chemicals disperse into the waters surrounding the pens with unknown affects on the surrounding aquatic ecosystem. The flesh of farmed salmon isn’t naturally pink in color like wild salmon. It’s an unappealing grayish brown, so dyes are added to farmed salmon feed to give the flesh a more appealing color.

In contrast, wild salmon are caught from the streams and ocean where they swim freely and grow without any antibiotics, vaccines, food coloring, or other chemicals.

Studies have shown that farmed salmon contain persistent cancer causing chemicals called polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB’s) in levels 5 to 10 times higher than those found in wild salmon. These chemicals were banned in 1976, but because of their persistent nature, continue to bioaccumulate in the fat of wild fish. The fishmeal farmed salmon are fed is made from the ground up by products of wild fish and is designed to contain high levels of fish oil. The problem is PCB’s concentrate in oils and fats so when the farmed salmon consume concentrated amounts of oil they also ingest concentrated amounts of PCB’s. This results in higher levels of PCB’s in farmed salmon’s flesh compared to levels in wild salmon.¹

1. Environmental Working Group: PCB’s in Farmed Salmon Factory Methods, Unnatural Results www.ewg.org/reports/farmedPCBs/

If you’re eating farmed salmon you’re also getting less of the valuable Omega-3 fatty acids normally found in wild salmon. USDA testing data shows that the fat of farmed salmon contains an average of 35% less omega-3 fatty acids. However according to the USDA you will be getting 52% more overall fat per ounce of farmed vs. wild salmon.s

The Food and Drug Administration Standards for PCB levels in commercial seafood have not been updated since they were initially issued in 1984. Research over the last two decades has shown PCB buildup to be a more potent cancer-causing agent that originally believed as well as indicating that it poses serious neurodevelopmental risks to unborn children from maternal consumption of PCB contaminated fish.

The Environmental Protection Agency sets health guidelines for PCB levels in wild caught fish and updated its guidelines in 1999 to reflect recent peer-reviewed science. EPA levels are 500 times more protective than the FDA guidelines. Based on the levels of PCB’s found in some independent studies the EPA guidelines would recommend eating not more than one farmed salmon meal per month.¹

Farming salmon pollutes and threatens water quality and the well being of wild salmon populations.

The process of farming salmon pollutes surrounding waters with large amounts of salmon waste, pathogens, and waste feed. Wild populations are threatened when farmed salmon inevitably escape their pens. Since some farmed salmon have been genetically engineered to grow faster and consume more food than a wild salmon the escaped fish have the potentials to out compete natural populations. The spread of disease from escaped farm raised salmon to wild salmon is another danger. And cross breeding between the two groups can result in the less adaptable farmed salmon decreasing the viability of wild ones.

What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You

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If you take a walk back through history, you can observe many products that were once on the market, which are now banned in US commerce. Chemicals such as PCB’s, DDT, Chlorpyrifos and Diazinon that at one time seemed to be the answer to the need for fire suppression or pest control, were discovered to be detrimental to human health and the environment. Unfortunately the policies that approved those chemicals for market are slow to change and many of the replacement products are not much better. To protect your health, try less toxic methods for cleaning and pest control, take a critical look at products, and educate yourself about the latest reports on environmental dangers.

There are things you can do to educate yourself and choose less toxic alternatives. The simplest solution is to keep untested chemicals out of your environment whenever possible. There are many simple cleaning products that have proven the test of time, and that are as effective or more effective than chemical products for sale today. In 1998, a peer review committee was formed in California by local agencies and industry to research simple compounds historically used for cleaning. See the sidebar on page one for a few product recommendations from that study. For the complete study and toxicity testing visit the website: www.greenconsumer.cc

1. Children’s Health Environmental Coalition www.cbectnet.org/prodres_sche_overview.asp

2. Environmental Working Group Body Burden Study www.ewg.org/reports/bodyburden/es.php

Household Hazardous Waste Disposal is Just a Few Clicks Away

The San Mateo County Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Program has established an online appointment system to serve county residents. In the past, appointments could only be made by phone, now there is the option of using the Internet. Established last year to better serve residents, over 45% of appointments to dispose of HHW are now made online. Residents may go to the website, www.smhealth.org/bbw/appt, to find the most convenient date and time; in just a few clicks they are signed-up for the next available appointment to fit their schedule. They are then notified by email when and where to show up to drop off their household items. The website also supplies residents with background on the program, items accepted and the procedure for transporting and disposing of waste. The HHW program provides San Mateo County residents information on the proper way to handle and dispose of items that they have in their home that are illegal to pour down the drain or throw in the garbage. The program has

responded to residents needs by expanding the number of collection events based on the demand. In the past three years the amount of waste collected has almost doubled, collection events have been scheduled to handle this demand, and a new facility is being developed in San Mateo to provide more service.

The Household Hazardous Waste appointment line, (650) 363-4718, is available to make appointments by phone. Call the Environmental Health Department at (650) 363-4305 if you have questions about the HHW program or go to www.smhealth.org/bbw.



How to Poison Your Water for Only \$2

An article, published in the November 1974 edition of *Hot Rod* magazine, instructs do-it-yourselfers in the art of oil disposal. Entitled "Backyard Oil Disposal, How to Create an Oil Dump in Your Own Backyard With an Hour's Work and a \$2 Investment" it demonstrates what seems like a good idea, but turns out to be an environmental disaster.

In 1974 the author had no idea that used oil is laden with toxic heavy metals that can pollute groundwater and soil. He sympathizes with the average Joe who changes the oil in his car himself to save a few bucks, but is left with the problem of disposal. He says dumping oil into the sewer is no good because it "makes quite a mess and fouls up the equipment in the sewage plant". He goes on to say "Since oil will kill any grass or plants that it contacts, you can't just dump it in the yard."

His solution, "a neat way to dispose of that old oil", is to find a convenient location, dig a hole 2-3 feet deep, fill it with gravel, and place a clay tile on top. Oil can then be poured into the hole where it will filter through the gravel and gradually soak into the earth below without disturbing surrounding plants.

Nowadays, we know that dumping used oil onto the ground or throwing oil filters in the garbage is not only illegal; it's dangerous to human and environmental health. Used oil and filters are hazardous waste in California and must be disposed of properly to avoid contaminating our environment. San Mateo County Environmental Health partners with over 70 auto shops and gas stations to accept used oil and filters from the public for free. Among these are your local Kragen, Jiffy Lube and others. Find the oil collection center nearest



Times have changed. Now we know dumping used oil in the yard is an environmental disaster.

you by calling 1-800-CLEANUP or visiting www.smhealth.org/bbw and clicking on Used Oil Collection Centers.

Thermometer Exchange April 19–23

Exchange your mercury thermometer for a digital model at any of the following locations during Earth Week, April 19–23. Please transport your mercury thermometer inside its original plastic case or sealed in two resealable plastic bags.

Atherton: 9 a.m.–noon & 1–5 p.m., Permit Center, 93 Station Lane, 752-0526

Belmont: 8 a.m.–noon & 1–5 p.m., City Hall, 1070 Sixth Ave., 595-7427

Brisbane: 8 a.m.–1 p.m. & 2–5 p.m., Friday 8 a.m.–1 p.m., City Hall, 50 Park Pl., (415) 508-2130

Burlingame: 9 a.m.–3 p.m., City Hall, 501 Primrose, 342-3727

Colma: 8 a.m.–noon & 1–5 p.m., 1188 El Camino Real, 757-8888

Daly City: 7 a.m.–5 p.m., 153 Lake Merced Blvd., 991-8208

East Palo Alto: 8 a.m.–4 p.m., 2200 University Ave., 853-3189

Half Moon Bay: 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m., City Hall, 501 Main St. 726-8260

Menlo Park: 7:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m., City Administration Bldg., 701 Laurel, 330-6763

Millbrae: 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m., City Hall, Public Works Office, 621 Magnolia Ave., 259-2339

Pacifica: 7:30 a.m.–5 p.m., Friday 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m., 151 Milagra Dr. at Oceana, 738-3768

Redwood City: 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m., Public Works Dept., 1400 Broadway, 780-7464

Redwood City: 7:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m., Monday–Thursday, Environmental Health, 455 County Center, 4th Floor, 363-4305

San Bruno: 8 a.m.–5 p.m., City Hall, Public Works Counter, 567 El Camino Real, 616-7065

San Mateo: 9 a.m.–2 p.m., City Hall Permit Counter, 330 W. 20th Ave., 522-7342

So. San Francisco: 11 a.m.–2 p.m., Municipal Services Bldg., 33 Arroyo, 877-8634



Electronics Recycling Fee Begins July 1

If you have needed to get rid of a computer, monitor, television or other electronic equipment lately, you may have discovered they aren't just garbage anymore. Each year hundreds of thousands of electronic items become "obsolete" in the eyes of consumers. Disposing of them in the garbage is a threat to environmental and human health because they contain high levels of metals including copper and lead. The California Department of Toxic Substances Department did preliminary studies and found these electronic devices exceed the State's hazardous waste thresholds.

Recently passed Senate Bill 20 will collect a fee for a statewide recycling program to help defray the cost of recycling for laptop computers, liquid crystal display (LCD) monitors and Cathode Ray Tubes (CRTs). The fee will range from \$6 to \$10 and will be collected upon the sale of these items beginning July 1, 2004.

For more information visit www.ciymb.ca.gov/electronics

Reduce Air Pollution with a New Electric Lawn Mower

Did you know a typical gas mower can emit the same amount of ozone-forming gas in one hour as a new car driven 340 miles? At the San Mateo County Lawn Mower Exchange you can trade in your old gas powered lawn mower and buy a new Black & Decker corded electric mulching mower at a \$100 discount.

This program is sponsored by San Mateo County RecycleWorks & Bay Area Air Quality Management District. For details, visit www.RecycleWorks.org or call 1-888-442-2666.

San Mateo County Lawn Mower Exchange
Saturday, May 15, 8 – 11 a.m.
Home Depot
2001 Chess Dr., San Mateo

Buyers must bring a gasoline-powered mower in working condition.

Cost of electric mower with trade-in: \$179 retail price - \$100 discount = \$79 plus tax

Available to San Mateo County residents only—bring proof of residency.



Black & Decker Corded Electric Mulching Mower (MM575)