Volume XVII, Number 1
January/February 2017

The Next STEP

Toward a Healthier Future

A Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Sebastopol Toxics Education Program

Advanced Ant Management

With the winter rain and cold can often come invasions of ants into our homes. These tiny teaming masses seek to share our warmth and find refuge from the weather, while savoring feasts in the crumbs and dribbles that we don't even notice.

It can be tempting to respond to this deluge by pulling out a pesticide spray. But a Stanford study shows that pesticides are no more effective with ants than household cleansers. Plus they can expose us and our families to neurological toxics that can harm our health. (For more about specific ant products and concerns, see *www.pesticidere search.com/site/?page_id=1143*. Also learn about how to assess pesticide products at *www.healthyworld.org/ GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol5no4.pdf.)*

So how can you manage these micro-marauders without toxics? Here's the easy least-toxic system I've developed over the years.

I. Your First Steps

■ **Block their entry point.** Follow the ants' trail back to where they enter the house, then plug the holes with caulk, putty, or toothpaste. (Also help reduce ant incursions overall by caulking along your house's inside baseboards, and ensuring good weather seals around doors and windows.)

■ **Eliminate what's attracting the ants.** Watch where they're going to see what food needs to be cleaned up, sealed up, or put in the fridge. Empty the trash and wash the can. If they've found your pet food bowl, place it in a larger dish filled with a soapy water moat.

■ **Wipe ant trails with a clean soapy sponge**, to remove their pheromone pathway.

■ **Add vinegar for extra punch.** You can put it on your soapy sponge. Or spray it diluted directly onto ants, or near their common entry points as a deterrent.

■ **Be consistent about keeping your kitchen clean, wiping counters, and putting food away.** Avoid leaving food elsewhere in the house. I call these little guys "Housekeeping Ants" because (like a white-gloved matron) they show me where I need more attention in my housecleaning practices!

II. Kick It Up A Notch

If, even after the above steps, your ants still persist in their misadventures, try these additional methods.

■ **Disrupt ant trails with orange oil**. Look to see if you already have a cleaner or wood polish with real orange oil in it; that's what I usually use. You can also make a spray by warming orange peels in water.

Another option is the less-toxic insecticide Orange Guard, made from a by-product of steam-distilled citrus peels. All ingredients are FDA food-grade and GRAS (Generally Recognized As Safe), and the product also works on other insects, such as aphids and fleas. Tests show that it has no significant toxicity

*See **Ants**, over*

It's Our Birthday!!

With this issue, we're celebrating 16 years of publishing *The Next STEP (TNS)!*

Our goal with this innovative City project is to nurture a healthier Sebastopol for everyone by reducing our exposure to toxics.

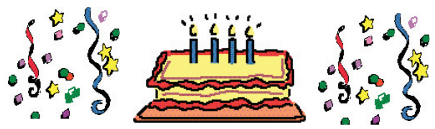
Thus, we help folks reduce the toxics in all areas of our lives — including our homes, schools, businesses, parks, food, and environment.

TNS is produced by a small team of local citizens, working on a volunteer basis (which keeps costs very low) because we support this goal. We're grateful to the City Council and staff for acting in the community's best interest with this project.

Now we need your help! Please fill out the enclosed survey card to give us your feedback about our efforts.

Also let us know how we can best support your toxics reduction in the coming year, including any questions, tips, story ideas, or success stories.

We want to hear from you! Your support makes this project possible. Thank you!



Did You Know?

***The Next STEP* costs the City almost nothing**. Created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense, it costs about $150 a year plus in-house copying. This is literally a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's $11 million annual budget. Given the consistent evidence that common toxics are harming us all, this is a bargain for our shared health, now and long into the future.

Minimize Your Sanitize

Throughout our days, we can see hand sanitizers used — by grocery store clerks and customers with carts, at schools and day care centers, and stashed in handbags for on-the-go use.

And certainly it seems easy — just squirt or wipe, we're told, and those scary germs will be gone.

But what's inside these products? Are they creating other health issues? Are they even effective?

Here are tips I've developed for wise use of hand sanitizers.

■ **Seek first to wash with soap and water, especially if you have food or dirt on your hands.** Even the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends hand washing first, and hand sanitizers only if that's unavailable.

That's because both approaches can kill bacteria and prevent infection's spread, with similar effectiveness.

But hand washing also removes fats and sugar deposits, plus dirt and dust that can be infused with germs and toxics. In contrast, a sanitizer puts materials on your skin that can remain and absorb into your body.

■ **If you need waterless washing, choose your product carefully.** Read the label and take any label warnings seriously, such as keeping them out of the reach of children to avoid ingestion.

Only use a product with a full ingredient list. Skip any with triclosan, benzalkonium chloride, propylene glycol, or a vague "fragrance" ingredient, as this term can hide a variety of toxic materials. If you use an alcohol-based product, be sure that it's at least 60% alcohol. Or try CleanWell hand sanitizer, which uses thyme oil, a natural antimicrobial.

■ **Coat your hands completely.**

■ **Avoid using it too often.** This can dry out your hands and increase your exposure to the ingredients.

■ **If you or your children use sanitizers, wash with soap and water before eating or licking your fingers.** Kids are often exposed to toxics from hand-to-mouth transfer, and you probably don't want you or them to eat a sanitizer and grime combo.

SOURCES: "Top Reasons to Avoid Hand Sanitizers," www.virginiahopkinstestkits.com/hand_sanitizers.html • www.ewg.org/research/healthy-home-tips/tip-5-wash-those-hands-avoid-triclosan

Timely Tips

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collection Day is on Tuesday March 21**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event.

■ **Local toxics disposal.** For more about discarding toxics, see the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency's website *www.recyclenow.org* or its Recycling Guide in your AT&T yellow pages. Or call them at 707/565-3375.

■ **Our TNS Online Index makes it easy for you** to quickly discover what's toxic and the effective alternatives. See *www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html*.

■ **To get *The Next STEP* by email, just sign up at** *www.healthyworld.org/EList.*

What Is Boric Acid?

Boric acid is an odorless inorganic white powder, derived from water and boron (an element). It's in products to control ants, ticks, fleas, cockroaches, silverfish, slugs, termites, and more. It's also used as a wood preservative and fire retardant.

Boric acid has a very low toxicity to humans and other mammals. However, it can be an irritant, so keep it away from food, children, and pets. Also, if you use the powder form, wear a dust mask, gloves, and eye protection.

***Ants**, continued*

to humans, though contact can irritate eyes or skin. Orange Guard is at stores, including Sebastopol Hardware and Friedman's. Or see *www.orangeguard.com.*

■ **Remove outside attractants**. Check the outside wall of their entry point. Is something there attracting them, such as a garbage can, compost pile, or vegetation? Consider pulling that away from the house.

III. If It's Still Serious

If ants are still coming into your home in significant quantities, consider these next-tier approaches.

■ **Use a boric acid bait.** These baits usually come in a convenient liquid form, and contain boric acid (a mined odorless white powder) plus a sweetening lure. (See the article to the right for more about boric acid.)

This less-toxic product will poison the ants' nest, so use it only if truly needed. And place all baits out of reach of curious pets and children.

Also, be sure to read ant bait product labels to avoid those with toxics such as arsenic, which can poison children, pets, and wildlife.

■ **Hire an expert who specializes in less-toxic remedies.**

And, while protecting your turf, remember the big picture — that the 10,000 species of ants around the globe are an essential part of nature's miraculous interwoven systems. Plus these social insects can lift 50 times their own weight! How cool is that?

SOURCE: "The Ants Go Marching In", Eric Brazil, San Francisco Chronicle, April 25, 2001

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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Printed on recycled paper.