

Many products that are used in our homes everyday contain chemicals that can be harmful to our families, our pets and the environment. Additionally, the manufacturing and disposal of hazardous chemicals contributes to pollution, and often places serious health burdens on communities located near these facilities. There are steps that can be taken everyday to minimize our exposure to toxic substances. In the process, we can make sure our families, our communities, our food and water supply, and our environment will be protected.

Here's a list of some of the products in everyday use and some ways to make safer choices:

CLEANING PRODUCTS:

Everyone likes a clean home, but many cleaning products contain toxic chemicals that can cause health problems. The EPA found that the air inside a home is typically 2 to 5 times more polluted than air located just outside it, largely because of the use of household cleaners and pesticides. You can make your own products, or purchase safer cleaning products.

Things You Can Do:

- **All Purpose Cleaner:** Use a mixture of vinegar and salt; or 4 tbsp baking soda in 1 quart warm water; or 2 tbsp borax in 3 cups of water.
- **Oven Cleaner:** Use oven liners when possible; clean with a paste of baking soda and water.
- **Antibacterial Soaps:** These promote drug resistant organisms, and chemicals from these soaps are being found in our water and in wildlife. The American Medical Association says that regular soap is just as effective.
- **Glass Cleaner:** Use a mix of ½ white vinegar and ½ water.
- **Scouring Powder:** Use baking soda.
- **Disinfectant:** Immerse object in boiling water if possible, or use hot water and soap to clean.
- **Mildew Remover:** Use a mixture of lemon juice and salt; or white vinegar and salt.

- If buying cleaning products, purchase non-toxic people-friendly and environmentally-friendly cleaning supplies whenever possible.

Resources:

- Clean Water Fund's site with information on a less toxic home: www.home-safe-home.org
- A Behind-the-Scenes Guide to the Things We Buy: www.worldwatch.org/pubs/goodstuff/
- Online environmental store and information resource center: www.greenhome.com

COSMETICS AND PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS:

Cosmetics and personal care products have changed dramatically over the past few decades. They now include a multitude of chemicals including synthetic and toxic dyes, preservatives, detergents, allergens and more. In addition there is no pre-market approval process for these products, and the FDA has no real regulatory power over their safety.

Things You Can Do:

- Many personal care products contain toxic preservatives. Read labels and avoid products that have parabens in them. Check out www.thinkbeforeyoupink.org for companies that preserve cosmetics without the use of parabens.
- See how your cosmetics and personal care products measure up in the Environmental Working Group report on product safety. <http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com>
- Choose products with ingredients you can recognize, organic ingredients, and those that are fragrance-free.
- Ask your local store to carry safer personal care products if they do not already do so.
- Go to www.safecosmetics.org and push for companies to make our personal care products safer.
- Learn to make your own body care products: <http://www.kitchen-cosmetics.com>

HOME AND GARDEN PEST CONTROL:

Designed to kill pests, these chemicals can contaminate your home, and can affect the health of your family and pets. Many pesticides are known to cause cancer, reproductive harm, or acute poisoning. Many act as endocrine disruptors, raising concern about their role in breast cancer. Infants and young children are more susceptible than adults to the toxic effects of pesticides. Farm workers and people who work with pesticides for a living are also more vulnerable because they receive greater daily exposures.

Things You Can Do:

- Keep your kitchen clean and dry. Store food out of reach from pests, and use caulk and netting to block pest entry points into your home.
- Use least toxic or nontoxic alternatives in your home and garden, and learn about Integrated Pest Management practices
- For pets with fleas, use a flea comb and drown captured fleas in soapy water. Vacuum frequently to remove flea eggs from your carpet.
- When possible, eat organic foods grown without pesticides or synthetic fertilizers. By purchasing organic foods, you support an agricultural system that is safer for workers and consumers, and healthier for the planet.

- If it is too expensive or difficult to get organic foods all the time, make an effort to purchase organic winter squash, peaches, apples, pears, grapes, green beans, spinach, strawberries and cantaloupe when possible. These are the conventionally grown foods most likely to retain significant pesticide residues.
- Ask your local store to carry organic food products if they do not already do so.
- Pesticides are widely used in school buildings and on school grounds despite the fact that children are especially vulnerable to the health impacts from these toxins. Ask your children's school what pesticides are used there, and the health effects associated with them.

Resources:

- Pesticide Action Network: <http://www.panna.org>
- Californians for Pesticide Reform: <http://www.pesticidereform.org>
- Shopper's Guide to Buying Organic: <http://www.foodnews.org>
- EPA site on Schools and Pesticide Use: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/ipm>
- EPA site on Integrated Pest Management: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/ipm.htm>
- California Health Schools: <http://www.calhealthyschools.org>

For more information, call 415/243-9301 or toll free: 877/2STOPBC, or see: www.bcaction.org

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