TAKING ACTION FOR TOXICS

Toxics issues affect us all in some way. Because of that, there are many ways that each of us can help in solving the problem. Actions we take can range from simple consumer choices to a more active role in community decision making to more responsible activities at the workplace. Read on for a list of 22 actions and choices that you can take personally to help.

1. In your home or in the office use unbleached or nondisposable coffee filters. The process of bleaching paper often creates dioxin, a toxic chemical that can end up in landfills and incinerators.

2. Ask your school or employer to use and recycle white paper. Colored paper requires more bleach in the recycling process to remove the inks and dyes.

3. When practical, use latex or water-based paint instead of oil-based paint. Oil-based paints and their solvents can be toxic, and the by-products of manufacturing these paints are dangerous pollutants.

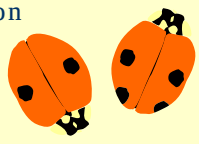
4. Instead of using toxic chemical pesticides on your garden, use organic ones such as rotenone and pyrethrin, or a soapy spray. Once pest populations are reduced, introduce predatory insects like ladybugs and praying mantises that eat the plant-eating pests. Chemical pesticides can endanger wildlife and beneficial insects, contaminate groundwater, and destroy soil microorganisms essential for healthy and productive plant growth.

5. Use the least toxic cleaners you can find, or make your own for easy cleaning jobs. Mix together vinegar and salt for use as a surface cleaner. Or add 4 tablespoons of baking soda to 1 quart of warm water, or even use plain baking soda on a damp sponge. To clean windows, mix 1 tablespoon of vinegar or lemon juice in 1 quart of water and spray on. Use newspaper to wipe windows and mirrors dry. For furniture, mix 1 teaspoon of lemon juice in 1 pint of mineral or vegetable oil, and wipe on furniture.

6. Avoid the use of toxic drain cleaners. Prevent clogged drains by straining food particles and hair, collecting grease in separate containers, and pouring boiling water or baking soda and vinegar down the drain. To open clogged drains, use a plunger instead of toxic chemical products. Or pour one cup of salt and one cup of baking soda down the drain, followed by six cups of boiling water, and let sit overnight.

7. Use a nonchlorine bleach whenever possible. Chlorine is a powerful chemical that can kill fish and other aquatic life if it ends up in streams, rivers, or lakes.

8. Help cut down on the use of toxic chemicals around your home by using natural lawn care methods. If homeowners reduced their use of pesticides by 10 percent, we'd remove 5 million pounds of toxic chemicals from the environment every year. Try weeding by hand, using ladybugs and other natural pest controls, and planting native species adapted to the conditions in your area to keep your yard healthy and toxics-free.



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9. Help improve your pet's (and the planet's) health by cutting down on flea powders and other toxic chemicals to control fleas. Use pesticides only during the height of flea season, wash your pet with soap and water, and use a flea comb regularly.

10. Instead of using toxic pesticides, try less toxic alternatives to battle cockroaches and ants in your home. Mix powdered sugar and borax in equal parts to make a powder and sprinkle it in places where the critters crawl.

11. Avoid using toxic chemicals on your carpet. To deodorize dry carpets, sprinkle liberally with baking soda. Wait at least 15 minutes and vacuum. Repeat as needed.

12. Ask the managers of the stores you frequent to offer effective alternatives to cleaning products that contain hazardous chemicals. Many types of nontoxic, environmentally friendly cleaning products are available.

13. Find out if any dry cleaners in your community use eco-friendly alternatives to perchlorethylene (known as perc), the most common chemical used in dry cleaning. A growing number of businesses are starting to offer alternatives to this toxic chemical that has been linked with cancer.

14. Learn about releases of toxic chemicals in your community and what you can do about it by consulting the EPA's toxic release inventory (TRI) at <www.epa.gov/tri>, or visiting Environmental Defense's scorecard Web site at <www.scorecard.org>. Organize a group of students to raise awareness in your school about the toxic chemicals being released in your community by helping them to navigate and understand the Web sites and having them share what they learn with the rest of the school.

15. Find a hazardous waste disposal site near you. The average American home contains 25 gallons of hazardous chemicals that must be disposed of properly when no longer needed. The American Petroleum Institute's Web site at <www.recycleoil.org> can help you find the nearest disposal site for household hazardous wastes such as paints, cleaners, oils, and pesticides.

16. Identify the toxic chemicals in your home. Common household items such as paints, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides often contain hazardous chemicals. Read the labels to find out if a product is toxic; look for warnings like danger, caution, toxic, corrosive, flammable, or poison. These products are considered household hazardous waste and should be disposed of properly. Contact your local environmental, health, or solid waste agency to find out if a collection program exists in your area.

17. Organize a group of students to conduct an inventory of the toxic chemicals in your school. Talk with your teachers, principal, cleaning staff, and groundskeepers to find out what kinds of cleaners, paints, and pesticides are being used around the school. Then look for ways they can be reduced, and present your toxics reduction plan to your principal.

18. Dispose of your rechargeable batteries properly. While rechargeable batteries help reduce the amount of waste in landfills, they do contain toxic chemicals. Look in the blue pages (government section) of your phone book for the number of your local office of environmental or sanitation services. Or call 1-800-8BATTER for information on a nationwide battery collection program.

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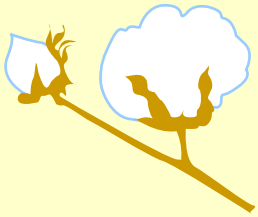
19. Use and store hazardous chemicals carefully. Never store hazardous products in food containers; instead, keep them in their original containers with their original labels. Seal containers tightly to prevent volatile chemicals from evaporating into the air. And never mix leftover hazardous substances, because they might react, ignite, or form a new mixture that is unrecyclable.

20. Help protect agricultural workers, yourself, and the environment by buying organically grown produce. Organic fruits and vegetables are grown without applying toxic pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and, therefore, are friendlier to farmers, consumers, and biodiversity.

21. Whenever possible, buy organic cotton. Cotton is the most pesticide-intensive crop in the world, accounting for 25 percent of the pesticides used in the world. Help give biodiversity a break from these toxic chemicals by buying organically grown cotton.



22. Help get your local golf course off "drugs." Across the nation, golf course groundskeepers are taking steps to reduce their use of toxic chemicals like pesticides. Golf courses that introduce measures to sustain biodiversity, reduce toxic chemical use, and reduce waste can become certified by Audubon International as Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries.