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Avoiding Hazardous Products Avoids Hazardous Waste And Helps The Environment

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The web site of the California Department of Resources Recovery and Recycling (CalRecycle) defines “green products” based on characteristics such as recyclability (for example, can it go in the curbside recycling carts of most cities?), recycled content (is it made from recycled material?), and energy efficiency (how much energy is used to make a product, and how much energy does it use?). Additional categories considered by CalRecycle relate to toxicity. For example, CalRecycle states true green products “emit few or no carcinogens, reproductive toxicants, or irritants as demonstrated by the manufacturer through appropriate testing.”

CalRecycle’s guidelines related to toxicity are important not just for protecting product user’s health, but also for safeguarding the environmental health of communities. When people avoid toxic products, they reduce risks associated with handling, storage, use, and improper disposal.

On a practical basis, advice comes from a variety of sources as to how consumers can reduce toxic exposure from products in their daily lives. One of the most popular sources is the “Dear Heloise” column in many local newspapers. “Heloise” (who, in the tradition of Dear Abby, goes by just a first name) has an entire web page devoted just to the ways in which vinegar and baking soda can be used as simple, safe substitutes for a variety of household cleaning products. Of course, she includes the well-known baking soda-plus-vinegar solution for unclogging drains, but she also includes a few more obscure tips. For example, she details the time and brew cycles required for using vinegar to clean stains off a coffee maker; she recommends a mix of 2 cups of vinegar to 1 gallon of water and using crumbled newspaper to clean windows and mirrors; and she recommends 4 tablespoons baking soda dissolved in 1 quart of water, along with a damp sponge, for scrubbing fiberglass or porcelain sinks, tubs, or showers.

Less conventional advice sometimes seems more like “home remedies,” but occasionally a reliable source, such as the City of Madison, Wisconsin, includes safe substitutes on their web site. For example, the Madison web site suggests the following alternative for ant poison: “Sprinkle chili powder, talcum powder or powdered chalk” where ants might enter your home. For cockroach poison, they advise “Use a mixture of baking soda and powdered sugar or a light dusting of Borax...around refrigerator, stove and ducts.” Acknowledging the efficacy of such solutions may not be sufficient, they

also advise, "Use cockroach traps," a solution for keeping toxic products contained in a small area and easy to handle.

Sometimes mechanical solutions avoid hazardous products. For example, an electric sander can substitute for furniture finish-stripping chemicals. Soapy water can control infestations of aphids on indoor plants. A pan of white vinegar can kill snails and slugs. Toothpaste and a soft wet cloth can clean silver, according to the Madison web site.

On both a larger scale and locally, some local nurseries are among the largest converts to the philosophy of safe substitutes for toxic products, seeing their approach as both good for the environment and good for business. For example, while activists led by Credo Action have started a letter writing campaign targeting a national home improvement chain with stores in Ventura County, accusing this retailer of selling plants pre-treated with the "bee-killing pesticide" category called neonicotinoids, Able Viallasenor, General Manager of a locally-based, small chain of garden stores was ready with a response to inquiries from these bee advocates. Viallasenor proudly described his company's purchase of plants from a nursery already converted from neonicotinoids to safer substitutes. Although his garden stores do sell a variety of systemic pesticides, they also promote their "alternatives" section, and according to Viallasenor, encourage customers to use non-toxic solutions.

You can keep your "eye on the environment" by using "green" products, including safer substitutes in place of toxics.

On the net:

<http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/greenbuilding/materials/>

http://www.heloise.com/hints_vinegar.html

<http://www.cityofmadison.com/streets/hazardous/alternatives.cfm>

["Systemic pesticides pose global threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services,"](#)
International Union for Conservation of Nature, June 24, 2014.

["Home Depot to Require Neonicotinoids Labeling,"](#) July 1, 2014.

<http://www.supergarden.com/ventura-green-thumb-international.htm>