

Eleven Easy Things To Do for Your Family and the Planet

1. Eliminate Lawn Pesticides - You can have a great looking lawn without the worries associated with toxic lawn chemicals. Find a landscaper who offers natural lawn care services (or a retailer who carries natural lawn care products) at www.ghlp.org and protect your family's health, your pets and your drinking water.

2. Reduce Your Use of Toxic Plastics - Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) (recycling code #3) is the most toxic of all plastics, from its manufacture to its disposal. New PVC products such as shower curtains, car interiors, sports equipment and plastic toys can outgas toxic plasticizing chemicals for long periods. Other toxic plastics to avoid are polystyrene (recycling code #6) and polycarbonate (recycling code #7). Plastic is a petroleum product and creates highly toxic pollutants when incinerated and does not biodegrade in the environment.

3. Don't Use Plastic to Store or Microwave Food Chemicals in plastic wraps, containers, or bottles can leach into foods or liquids. Store leftovers in glass, stainless or ceramic containers and never use plastic in the microwave (even if it says "microwave-safe" on the container - this just means it will not melt). Heat accelerates the leaching of chemicals from the plastic into the food.

4. Use Green Cleaning Products - Cleaning products contain many harsh chemicals which can trigger asthma attacks and allergic reactions, along with a myriad of other health problems. Fragrances and dyes are particularly problematic for chemically-sensitive individuals, so look for unscented, bio-based, non-toxic alternatives or make your own from common kitchen ingredients. For more information on non-toxic cleaning and a list of safe products, visit www.grassrootsinfo.org.

5. Avoid Antibacterial Soap - Studies on triclosan, the active ingredient in most antibacterial personal care products, shows that it may react with chlorinated water to form chloroform and is also linked to the rise in antibiotic-resistant bacteria. These are two compelling reasons for choosing "pediatrician recommended" old fashioned soap and water for washing!

6. Buy Local Organic Food - Buying locally grown organic food is healthier for you, cuts down on the use of fossil fuels and reduces global warming. It is especially important for babies and young children to eat pesticide-free foods as their bodies are developing and more vulnerable to chemical insults in general. Join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group in your community, where you can get

fresh, seasonal organic food and support local farmers who use sustainable agricultural methods.

7. Green Your Closet - Choose a dry cleaner who doesn't use perchloroethylene (PERC), a toxic chemical and common ground water contaminant. "Green" cleaners are sprouting up all over - look for those who use either a water-based or liquid carbon dioxide process for a truly safe and environmentally friendly alternative. When buying clothes, choose organic cotton or other natural fibers that can be washed at home. Synthetics and fabrics that are treated for stain and water resistance release potent chemicals into the air and can be absorbed through the skin.

8. Reduce Exposure to Vehicle Exhaust - Vehicle exhaust contains many hazardous air pollutants, including some known human carcinogens. The EPA states that there is no safe level of exposure to diesel exhaust. Encourage your school to adopt a no-idling policy, don't drive when you can hike or bike, carpool when possible and think about a hybrid when considering the purchase of a new car. Vehicle exhaust contributes significantly to global warming.

9. Drink Safe - If you are concerned about the quality of your drinking water, filtering it at home is the best solution. A whole house filter in your basement and a reverse osmosis (RO) or structured matrix filter on your kitchen sink will do a good job of removing unwanted pathogens and chemicals. Use glass or stainless steel water bottles filled with your own purified water instead of buying water in plastic bottles.

10. Freshen Your House - Scented candles or air fresheners which claim to make your home smell "fresh and clean" actually fill the air with harmful chemicals which can cause health problems, especially for those with asthma or other respiratory illnesses. To clear out stale air and out-gassing chemicals, open windows on a breezy day, burn natural beeswax candles and buy some house plants.

11. Redecorate With Safer Materials - Much of our indoor air pollution comes from paints and stains, sealants and glues, furniture made from particle board, carpets and plastic foam. When possible, choose low or no-VOC paints, natural fiber carpets, hardwood furniture and solid wood kitchen cabinets. Replace old foam upholstery filling with natural materials. Particle board, stain and fire retardant treatments on foam cushions and mattresses are particularly problematic. Organic fabrics, free from water- and stain-repellant chemicals, are preferable if available.