

Washing Hands with Toxic Pesticides?

Barbara D'Emilio

"Tug on anything at all and you'll find it connected to everything else in the universe."
— John Muir, advocate for preserving wilderness, co-founder of the Sierra Club

The Softsoap ads tell us that hand washing prevents the spread of infection and promotes good health. Yet they don't mention that Softsoap Anti-bacterial Liquid Soap contains triclosan, a toxic

pesticide that has been linked to health problems.

Many people think anti-bacterial products will help them stay healthy. But does it make sense to kill germs with a toxic pesticide?

Manufacturers are adding triclosan to large number of products including deodorants, cleaning supplies, shaving cream, and mouthwash. Under the name of microban, this pesticide

is added to bedding, socks, backpacks, kitchenware, toys, and furniture.

Many people think anti-bacterial products will help them stay healthy. But does it make sense to kill germs with a pesticide that is basically a nerve gas? If you tug, as John Muir suggests, you find that triclosan is linked to liver damage, respiratory problems, and thyroid imbalances. Most importantly, triclosan may impact the development of the brain and nervous system in children, causing learning problems.

What Happens When You Tug?

Get a blank sheet of paper. Write the word triclosan in the middle. Circle it. Elsewhere on the page, write the names of things that it affects. Draw lines that appropriately connect all these things. Do you agree with John Muir's quote above?



Triclosan is not even very effective. You can get your hands just as clean by washing them for 20 seconds using regular soap and water. The increased use of triclosan creates "superbugs," bacteria that mutate, become resistant to the pesticide, and grow more rapidly. In addition, when this newly resistant bacteria infect people, they do not respond as well to antibiotics.

Tug yet again and you find triclosan in our environment. As triclosan enters the waterways, it kills algae. Fish become toxic. Triclosan is also found in the soil where we grow our food. Studies have found this neurotoxin in the blood urine and breast milk of women across the globe.

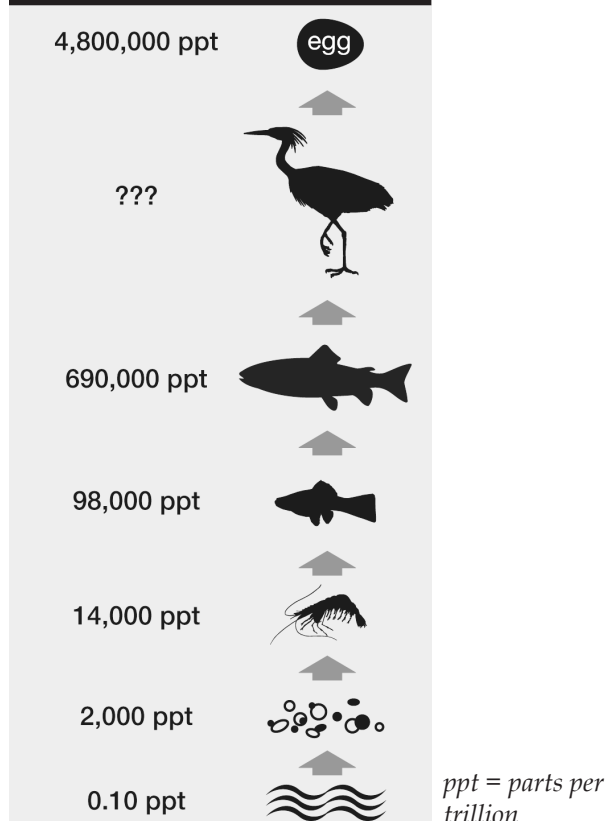
John Muir reminded us that everything is connected to everything else. If we wash our hands with triclosan, we might think we are simply cleaning our hands. But we might also be damaging our bodies, our children, and our environment. Japan, Canada, and the European Union have restricted the use of triclosan. The U.S. should take action as well. See the box for some

things you can do. Your action now will help assure that the connections we have with each other and with the environment are healthy, nurturing, and long lasting.

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Sources: <www.huffingtonpost.com> 4/8/2010; Allmyr M. et al. "Triclosan in plasma and milk ..." *Science of the Total Environment*, 372(1): 87-93 Dec. 2006; <beyondpesticides.org>.

Toxins in the Food Chain



In the process of "biomagnification," a toxin enters the water and gets more concentrated as it moves up the food chain. Some pesticides are endocrine disruptors – they act like hormones in the body, changing the way cells act and develop. These pesticides are linked to birth defects, cancers, and reproductive problems. The damage they cause may not be seen or felt for years.

Source: <www.nrdc.org/health/effects/qendoc.asp>

What Can You do about Triclosan?

A high-quality, foam soap that is 99

Drug Facts

Active ingredient

Triclosan, 0.30%

Uses ■ For hand washing to reduce

1. Read the label! Don't use products that contain triclosan, triclocarban, and microban. Consult <www.beyondpesticides.org/anti-bacterial/products.htm> for information on product safety.
2. Write a letter to your favorite stores; ask them to stop selling products that contain triclosan.
3. Visit <www.foodandwaterwatch.org/2010/12/ban-ban-the-triclosan> to submit a public comment to the EPA regarding triclosan. The Environmental Protection Agency is accepting comments from the public on triclosan.
4. Make your own non-toxic cleaning supplies. Get your children to help. Here's one recipe. Find more at: <www.care2.com/greenliving/make-your-own-non-toxic-cleaning-kit.html>.

Creamy Soft Scrubber

- Pour about 1/2 cup of baking soda into a bowl, and add enough liquid detergent to make a texture like frosting.
 - Scoop the mixture onto a sponge, and wash the surface.
- Rinses easily and doesn't leave grit.