



TRIBUTARY

Spring 2004

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

Environmental Hazards at Home

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Have you ever read the small print on your toothpaste box? Ever wondered why it tells you to contact the Poison Control Center if your child accidentally swallows it? There is no way toothpaste could be toxic, right?

Just like toothpaste, there are many other products that we use daily without ever reading the labels. Some of them are used for washing, others for cleaning or getting rid of pests. Many contain chemicals that are highly toxic and can create health risks. At the same time, they may also add to already existing indoor air pollution problems.

Many common household products emit toxins into the air. When we use these products, we expose ourselves to high pollutant levels. Elevated concentrations remain in the air even after the product is put away.

The health problems associated with toxic household products include eye and respiratory irritation, headaches, dizziness and allergies. Some of these products may cause cancer. The symptoms may vary, and depend on the type of chemical, the level of exposure, and the length of time you are exposed to them.

It is important that you read the label carefully before purchasing a product, even if it is "just" hair spray or nail polish remover. Look for warning phrases such as "keep out of reach of children" and "only use in well ventilated areas." Even if you do not understand chemistry, these phrases indicate that there is something toxic present.



*New York State Department of
Environmental Conservation
George E. Pataki, Governor
Erin M. Crotty, Commissioner*

Try to find products that are made of natural ingredients. However, keep in mind that just because something is labeled "natural" or "herbal" it does not necessarily mean that it is more effective or less harmful than other products. Those words are there for commercial reasons. Look for words such as "organic" or "non-toxic." Many non-toxic alternatives are available for detergents, cleaning products, shampoos, insect repellents and everything you might need at home.

Sometimes you may choose to use toxic chemicals. When you do, always follow the label instructions carefully. Make sure you get plenty of fresh airflow. If possible, perform the activity outdoors. Store all chemicals in air-proof containers in a place that is well out of reach of children. When you are ready to dispose of the product, do it safely. Find out if your community sponsors special days for the collection of toxic household wastes.

In addition to some of the household products, carpets and furniture that are made with synthetic materials can also emit harmful chemicals into the air. The symptoms associated with new household furnishings, especially carpets, include eye, nose, and throat irritation; headaches; skin irritations; shortness of breath or cough; and fatigue.

When purchasing new carpet, ask the retailer for information to help you select a lower-emitting fabric. Another important thing is to unroll the carpet and let it air out (*off-gassing*) before installation. Once carpet is installed, keep doors and windows open, or if possible, leave the house for a few days. Most of the harmful chemicals are emitted in the first few days after installation.

Many pressed wood products, clothing, draperies and paints emit a colorless, pungent "new-smelling" gas called formaldehyde. We all have these products at home, and therefore, may be exposed to formaldehyde. Symptoms vary between individuals and may include watery eyes, sore throat, nausea, and breathing difficulties. People with asthma may experience more attacks. Formaldehyde is known to cause cancer in animals, and it is a possible human carcinogen. As with carpets, formaldehyde emissions usually decrease as the product gets older.

One reason why indoor air quality has become more of a problem recently is weatherproofing. Our houses may keep the heat in, but they also keep the fresh air out. When there is little or no air flow, pollutants can build up and reach high concentrations. Saving energy is very important, but it is also important to open the window every now and then. According to research done at NASA, another way to help remove pollutants from the air is to place green plants near pollution sources. Common houseplants have the ability to break down and absorb toxins, using their component parts as nutrients, and therefore plants clean the air we breath.

Nevertheless, the best way to reduce the health risks associated with toxic household products is to choose less toxic alternatives or avoid using them altogether. For example, many of the insects that might be found in our homes will not harm anyone. Why not stop spraying that toxic pesticide? Instead, get a magnifier and study a bug with your children. After that, you can gently pick up the insect visitor and take it outside.

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center Spring Program Schedule 2004

Programs are free of charge unless otherwise noted. Participants should dress for the weather! We regret that we cannot accommodate organized youth groups at these programs. Please call to make special arrangements for a group.

We welcome those who have any type of physical challenge to all of our programs; call ahead to let us know your needs.

For further information or for pre-registration, call Five Rivers at (518) 475-0291. In the event of severe weather, programs may be cancelled. Please call the Center to confirm.

Saturday, April 3 *Watchable Wildlife: ROBINS AND THEIR KIN* 10:00am

John Burroughs proclaimed April the month of the Robin, with whose "first utterance the spell of winter is thoroughly broken." Join us on a field study of robins, bluebirds and our other friends in the thrush family as we celebrate the great Catskill naturalist's 167th birthday.

Saturday, April 3 *Family Fun: MAKE A BIRDHOUSE* 2:00pm

Early April is a great time to set out a birdhouse. And this program, geared for parent-and-child participation, is all you need to get started. You'll learn all about cavity-nesting birds, and then measure, mark, glue, screw and hammer together your own standard bird house suitable for bluebirds, tree sparrows or house wrens! Please call the Center to pre-register by March 26. \$5 materials fee for FFR members; or \$7.

Wednesday April 7 VOLUNTEER INSTRUCTOR TRAINING 9:30am-12noon

An introduction to Five Rivers' popular guided school program. We serve thousands of school children each year, providing exciting, hands-on nature lessons to small groups of kids from pre-school to eighth grade. Want to join us? Come see what it's all about-- there's no obligation. Registration and refreshments start at 9:00am. Other follow-up trainings are offered on later dates in spring, so if you can't make this meeting, give us a call at 475-0291.

Tuesday, April 13 *Naturalists as Reading Partners: SPRING* 10:00am

Take a nature break during school vacation week! We'll read a spring story, suitable for early elementary-age children, and go for a nature walk. After an outdoor exploration, we'll then watch birds at the feeder. \$1 a person; please call to pre-register by April 11. Parents and children must accompany each other.

Saturday, April 17 WILD TURKEY TRAIL WALK 2:00pm

A long hike on our longest trail. The Wild Turkey Trail crosses spring meadows and winds through the forest. We'll pass Five Rivers' experimental WHIP area (Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program) where we have planted native grasses and have a periodic mowing program set up to keep this area "forever meadow." Come prepared to hike approximately two miles.

Saturday, April 24

How To Do It: PLANTINGS FOR WILDLIFE

2:00pm

Want to get more catbirds and cowbirds in your dogwoods? Earth Day is a great time to learn the cardinal rules of enhancing the wildlife value of your yard. Join us for an indoor/outdoor discussion of trees, shrubs and garden plants which we all hold dear.

Wednesday, April 28

THE INS AND OUTS OF WORKING WITH KIDS

Part One 10:00am-12:00 noon

Kids in the Classroom

Working with students in a classroom setting is rewarding, challenging...and tough. During this two-hour training session, we'll discuss ways and means of making a classroom experience more enjoyable. We'll discuss working with the teacher in advance to smooth out as many obstacles as possible, and make sure you and the teacher are on the same page. We'll discuss classroom logistics, how you can enforce positive discipline, and when to call in the teacher. We'll demonstrate some ways to do an environmental or natural science class that don't involve a dry lecture. We'll also demonstrate some things *not* to do, and talk about common pitfalls and problems.

Part Two 1:00pm-3:00pm

No Desks, No Walls: Kids Outdoors

Working with students in the outdoors is rewarding, challenging...and even tougher! Kids think of the outdoors as a place to run around and have fun in, not as a place for education. Yet there is no better way to get students' attention and to excite them than by going outdoors. This two-hour training session will explore some techniques for teaching an outdoor lesson to students from early elementary to middle school, and will cover outdoor safety, crowd control, positive discipline and ways of making sure that all of your audience can safely see, hear, touch and experience as much of the outdoors as possible. We will be going outdoors, rain or shine, dress appropriately!

A pizza lunch will be available (\$5) or bring your own lunch.

Please call (518) 475-0291 to pre-register for either or both sessions.

Friday April 30

Frogwatch: SPRING PEEPERS

7:00pm

Ah, the sounds of spring—you know—the deafening ones. Frogs! On this walk to the marsh our quest will be our smallest frogs, the spring peepers. These diminutive tree frogs have voices out of all proportion to their size. Each spring, males make their way to the marsh to announce mating readiness to discriminating females.

Saturday, May 1

PROJECT WET WORKSHOP

10:00am- 3:00pm

This workshop will introduce "Project WET" (Water Education for Teachers). Participants will receive a manual of activities suitable for teaching about water science, aquatic wildlife, and environmental issues. Pre-register by April 29. Dress for the outdoors. Teacher in-service credit can be coordinated through the Greater Capital Region Teacher Center.

THE EARLY BIRDER

Walks are held on Thursday mornings: **May 6, 13, 20, and 27.**

The early birder gets the bagels! Plus some great birding in Five Rivers' woods, fields, and wetlands. This spring, birders will get some great coffee, too. We serve **shade-grown organic coffee** at our bird walks. This coffee is grown in a manner that preserves the rainforest canopy that is such an important habitat for so many migratory birds. It is “fairly traded,” organically grown, and on top of all that, it tastes great!

Join us at 7:00am for refreshments and feeder birds. The outdoor walk begins at 7:30.

Beginners are always welcome! Bring binoculars and bird identification guides if you have them—we have some to lend.

Friday, May 7 *Watchable Wildlife:* THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK 7:00pm

In the last decade, the American Woodcock has had its ups and downs. Changing land use practices and other factors have had a significant effect on this gamebird throughout the eastern seaboard. Join us for an uplifting look at woodcock management as we search field and fen for this most extraordinary bird.

Saturday, May 8 *Reception/Opening:* WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY SHOW 2-4 pm

Join us for a “meet-and-greet” reception for wildlife photographer John Norton, as he opens a pictorial essay entitled, “The Fawns of Five Rivers.” All photos were taken on the grounds. The installation will hang in our Exhibit Room from May 1 through June 26.

Sunday, May 9 *Watchable Wildlife:* MOTHER GOOSE WALK 2:00pm

Five Rivers’ Canada goose population has bred here for decades. Join us as we search for mother and father geese, and check on whether any of the eggs have hatched yet.

Saturday, May 15 SNAKES ALIVE! 2:00pm

Is it poisonous? Does it bite? Can you tell a milk snake from a copperhead? Snakes have an unfounded reputation as a repulsive animal, but are really fascinating creatures. We will display live snakes found in New York State and discuss their natural history. The three venomous natives will be kept in glass-fronted, locked boxes, but the others will be touchable wildlife.

Friday May 21 FROGWATCH 7:00pm

Join us for a frogwatch, a way of monitoring amphibian populations. This program is designed for children and youth groups. We’ll acquaint you with the sounds of local frogs, and some live animals, and then go outdoors to listen for calls. Families may attend without pre-registering; youth groups must call to pre-register. Bring flashlights if you have them, and shoes that you don’t mind getting wet.

Saturday, May 22 WHAT'S BLOOMING? 2:00pm
The unique flowers of spring have very short blossoming times. On this outdoor walk we will search out the woodland garden. Stories, myths, medicinal and ritual uses will be some of the topics discussed.

Sunday, May 23 HALL OF FAME DAY RECEPTION 2:00pm
DEC's Delmar facility has contributed mightily over the years to America's conservation movement and its proud and colorful legacy is revered far and wide. Join us for our 2nd annual Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony as we celebrate the lifetime achievements of Delmar staffers and site-related personnel who made a difference. This year's inductees are: Bob and Eleanor Alexander, Steve Fordham, Bob Darrow, Ed Gervais, and Earl Westervelt. The honorees will be commemorated in the Center's permanent *Delmar Hall Of Fame* exhibit.

Saturday, June 5 *How To Do It: NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS* 9:00am
The goal of the NYS Breeding Bird Atlas is to identify birds singing in territory, carrying nesting material or displaying other breeding behavior. Join us on a field foray to census our breeding birds and learn how you too can participate in the final year of this 5-year state-wide study.

Friday, June 11 FROGWATCH 7:30pm
By June, the peepers are quieting down and the bullfrogs are tuning up. Join us for a group frogwatch. First we'll acquaint you with the sights and sounds of our local frogs and toads, including a look at some live amphibians. Then we'll go afield to frogwatch: monitor the health of our amphibian population by documenting the type and intensity of calls we can hear in the Five Rivers wetlands. Bring flashlights if you have them, and shoes that you don't mind getting wet.

Saturday, June 12 DRAGONS ON THE WING 2:00pm
Dragonflies have some of the most amazing behaviors in the insect world, and their large size makes them conspicuous enough to observe. On this walk to the pond we will spend time watching and wondering at their many social interactions. Bring binoculars if you have them, or borrow ours.

Sunday, June 20 MID-SUMMER'S FLOWER WALK 2:00pm
Mid-summer marks the longest days of the year, followed by the shortest nights. Much flower lore surrounds this traditional time of magic. On our walk we will search out the timely blooms that our ancestors connected with mystery, and discuss their use in plant lore as well as their natural history and uses for wildlife.

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