

# Health & Environment

Connection

A publication of LocalMotion, a non-profit organization dedicated to "Better Health through Fewer Toxins"

Volume 3, Number 1 / Winter 2006

## Melt the Ice



Most popular ice melting products are made from sodium chloride (rock salt—inexpensive) or calcium chloride (effective at very low temperatures: -20 F). Rock salt, however, is toxic to vegetation and calcium chloride can mark carpets and other flooring by leaving a residue when tracked into the house. Magnesium chloride and potassium chloride, are sometimes used to melt ice as well. All four of these chloride-containing ice melters are corrosive to metal and increase the amount of times ice will thaw and refreeze—damaging concrete and asphalt. Chloride salts pull heavy metals out of soil, allowing them to get into groundwater and local waterways. These salts may drive away or kill beneficial organisms in soil that support a healthy garden environment. Chloride salts are also not safe to use around pets and children because they can irritate skin (particularly damp skin) or poison pets, if ingested by an animal eating snow or licking its paws.

Urea (carbonyl diamide) is safer for pets and kids. But, just like urea in synthetic lawn fertilizer it releases nitrates when it enters our waterways—contributing to an overgrowth of algae and depleting oxygen levels in lakes and streams. It is also corrosive to metal and can harm vegetation when used in high amounts.

The safest products we found contain **Calcium Magnesium Acetate (CMA):** *Landscaper's Choice* (www.kissner.com) and *PetGold* (PetCo.) or **urea blended with a glycol mixture** that acts as a nitrogen inhibitor to keep it out of the water supply: *Safe Paw* (Kroger and PetCo.) and *PetSafe* (St. Clair Shores ACE Hardware and www.gardeners.com). These products are more effective than salt and require smaller applications.

## Healthy Pets

—Melissa Cooper Vachon

To fend off the wintertime blues, sometimes all we need is a good companion. For many Americans, pets fit the bill perfectly. Here are some tips to keep your furry friends (and you) healthy.

**NATURALLY CLEAN.** Like shampoo for people, pet shampoos may contain synthetic ingredients linked to cancer. Brands such as Earthbath and Vermont Soap Organics depend on ingredients like olive oil, essential oils, enzymes, and aloe vera to break down dirt, relieve odors, soothe your pet's skin, and shine its coat. For a quick clean keep natural pet wipes and sprays or spritzes by Earth Friendly and Earthbath handy.

**CHEW ON THIS: natural rubber or cotton toys,** rather than vinyl toys, which contain phthalates and may contain lead (see *Lead for Lunch?* on page 4). Toys labeled "latex" may actually be vinyl.

**POISON! KEEP AWAY!** Some houseplants, including: caladium, dumb cane (leopard lily), English ivy, lilies, mistletoe, oleander, philodendron are poisonous to pets when eaten.

**NO CLAY IN THE CATBOX.** Clay litters contain crystalline silica, a known human carcinogen according to the National Toxicology Program's 11<sup>th</sup> Report on Carcinogens. The silica dust may also irritate lungs. Refer to our Resource List, which follows, for numerous non-clay options.

**ABSORB, rather than mask odors.** Popular air "fresheners" can contain harmful ingredients that pollute indoor air (see box on page 3). Sprinkle a layer of baking soda on

carpet, furniture, or pet beds. Leave for 15 minutes and vacuum. Use in and around litter box also. Leave vented boxes near problem areas. Earth Friendly's Kitty Litter Treatment contains baking soda and enzymes to boost its effectiveness. Zeolite is a mineral that absorbs odor even more efficiently than baking soda. Use powder form (such as Odorzout) as you would baking soda. Zeolite pebbles or stones can be placed in problem areas and recharged in sunlight. A cup of vinegar near litter boxes and pet cages will absorb odors.

**OUT SPOT!** Seventh Generation's Carpet Cleaner or Earth Friendly's Everyday Stain & Odor Remover are very effective on pet stains and odors on furniture and carpets. Or apply a 1:3 solution of vinegar and warm water, dab with a clean towel and repeat until clean. These may also be used for non-toxic steam cleaning.

**CLEAR THE AIR** with a high quality air filter (non-ozonating) to remove odors and fine particles, such as dust and dander from the air. Do not use air filters that produce ozone, which at ground level is a pollutant. Find one

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# LIP BALMS AND LOTIONS

To beat the dry days of winter choose lotions, lip balms, and other moisturizing products made from vegetable oils (such as sweet almond, sunflower, olive), rather than petroleum-based products containing mineral oil, petrolatum, or paraffin.

Debra Lynn Dadd, author of *Home Safe Home*, writes “Mineral oil, in fact, dries the skin, so you have to keep applying the cream...Skin absorbs the natural oil more easily, and it is more healing than mineral oil.”<sup>1</sup>

The “protective” layer petroleum products form on the skin and lips actually prevents moisture absorption. Mineral oil has also been linked to arthritis in animal studies.<sup>2</sup>

Also look for natural glycerin as another beneficial ingredient. According to Dadd, “Moisturizing creams and lotions...containing natural glycerin act as magnets to draw water out of the atmosphere and hold it until the skin needs more water.”<sup>1</sup>

Lip balms commonly contain petrolatum or paraffin, both of which may be contaminated with impurities linked to cancer and are restricted for use in Europe. Beeswax, candelilla wax, and carnauba wax are natural alternatives to petrolatum and paraffin.

Watch out for medicated lip balms, such as those by Chapstick and Blistex, which contain phenol. Phenol



is classified by the European Union as, “Toxic by inhalation, skin contact, and ingestion.”<sup>3</sup> According to the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry, “Phenol is a manufactured substance found in a number of consumer products. Skin exposure to high levels of phenol has resulted in liver damage, diarrhea, dark urine, and hemolytic anemia.”<sup>4</sup>

Other problematic ingredients for both lotions and lip balms include preservatives such as BHA (Reasonably Anticipated Human Carcinogen according to the National Toxicology Program's 11th Report on Cancer)<sup>5</sup> and methyl, ethyl, propyl, and butyl parabens (which act like estrogen and may disrupt normal hormone functioning).

## Remember:

- Don't settle for undocumented terms like “natural” or “herbal” in the product name. **Read ingredients** and make sure there's no petroleum-derived ingredients, phenol, or synthetic preservatives such as BHA or parabens.
- **Trust worthy brands** include: Aubrey's Organics, Avalon Organics, Badger, Burt's Bees, Desert Essence, Giovanni, Jason, Terressentials, Un-Petroleum, and Weleda.
- You can also **look for the USDA organic seal**; mineral oil, petrolatum, paraffin, and other petrochemicals are synthetic and are not allowed in products carrying the USDA organic seal.

1. Dadd, Debra Lynn. *Home Safe Home*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc.; 1997.
2. Sverdrup B. et al. Common Commercial Cosmetic Products Induce Arthritis in the DA Rat. *Environ Health Perspect* 106:27-32 (1998). <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/docs/1998/106p27-32sverdrup/abstract.html>
3. Environmental Working Group. Skin Deep. Ingredient Report: Phenol. 2006. [www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep2](http://www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep2)
4. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. ToxFQAQs for Phenol. 1999. [www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts115.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts115.html)
5. National Toxicology Program. 11th Report on Carcinogens. 2005. <http://ntp.niehs.nih.gov>



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## HEALTHY PETS continued from page 1

that is AHAM (Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers) certified: [www.cadr.org/consumer/certified.html](http://www.cadr.org/consumer/certified.html)

**KEEP IT CLEAN.** Vacuum at least twice a week. A HEPA filter on a vacuum captures 95% of all particles and prevents them from being blown back out through the exhaust.

## RESOURCE LIST

**Earth Friendly** ([www.ecos.com](http://www.ecos.com)): natural food stores and Farmer Jack

**EarthBath** ([www.earthbath.com](http://www.earthbath.com)): PetCo.

**Vermont Soap Organics** ([www.vermontsoap.com](http://www.vermontsoap.com) or 1-866-SOAP-4U2)

**Odorzout** ([www.odorzout.com](http://www.odorzout.com)): PetSmart, True Value

**Seventh Generation** ([www.seventhgen.com](http://www.seventhgen.com)): natural food stores and Kroger

## NON-CLAY LITTERS

**Swheat Scoop** ([www.swheatscoop.com](http://www.swheatscoop.com)) - clumping flakes of wheat: Kroger, Meijer, Target, Lowe's, PetCo, PetSmart  
**CitraMax** ([www.citramax.com](http://www.citramax.com)) - dried citrus peels: PetSmart, PetCo, Target

**Feline Pine** ([www.felinepine.com](http://www.felinepine.com)) - clumping and non-clumping, also for pet cages: pet food stores, K-Mart, Meijer, Kroger

**Silica crystals or pebbles** (various brands-no dust): pet food stores, Target, Meijer

**World's Best Cat Litter** ([www.worldsbestcatlitter.com](http://www.worldsbestcatlitter.com)) - corn cobs: Pet Supplies Plus, Pointe Pet Supply

**Yesterday's News** ([www.yesterdaysnews.com](http://www.yesterdaysnews.com)) - recycled newspaper, also for pet cages: pet food stores, Meijer



# Greener Cleaners

—Jennifer Adlhoch

## H<sub>2</sub>O CLEANERS

Wet cleaning is finally here! A safe and healthier alternative to dry cleaning has opened for business at 1925 Vernier in Grosse Pointe Woods (313-640-4426). The owners of **H<sub>2</sub>O Cleaners**, Kwang and Silvia Chung, have previous experience in dry cleaning, but have now chosen to expand their business to include the latest technology. Wet cleaning, a slow-cleaning process that does NOT use any harsh or toxic chemicals, was chosen because of the owners' health and environmental concerns. After trying the process, the owners loved the feeling of the textures, the brighter colors of the clothing and the lack of chemical smell that resulted.

When you choose wet cleaning over traditional dry cleaning, your clothes are washed in a fresh load of chemical-free water for a longer period of time at a very low temperature. Each garment is analyzed to determine the appropriate water temperature and agitation to be used. Next, a high-quality pressing machine is used to steam all clothing. According to Mr. Chung, all clothing fabrics are safe to wet clean and even cashmeres, wools and silks all come out great. Wet cleaning will even remove chemical residues from previously dry cleaned clothes, giving them a lighter feel.

Now, when the owner arrives home from working in the wet cleaning business, he says he “does not have to immediately shower or change his clothes before hugging his children.”

The Center for Neighborhood Technology, an Illinois-based nonprofit organization, has performed a study on a wet cleaning business in Chicago for the past 10 years. They agree that the environmental benefits are considerable because no hazardous chemicals are used, no air pollution results and there is no soil/water contamination. In fact, the majority of costs associated with wet cleaning go toward paying skilled employees instead of expensive chemicals and the disposal of hazardous wastes.

In the end, the costs to the consumer are the same as a traditional dry cleaning service. In this case, the owners charge the same prices for cleaning garments at their new wet cleaning business as they do at their traditional dry cleaning business. So give wet cleaning a try so we can all breathe a little easier!

For wetcleaning services in the Warren area try Executive Cleaners (586-574-0959) at 28829 Hoover. And ask about wetcleaning at your favorite cleaners.

Sources: [www.cnt.org](http://www.cnt.org)

### Fresh Air

**Avoid aerosol, solid, and plug-in air fresheners.** These air “fresheners” release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the areas where we live and work. Aerosols disperse the chemicals as a fine mist. Once in the air the tiny particles may be inhaled and are able to penetrate deep into the

lungs. VOCs, such as limonene and pinene are released from solid air fresheners and plug-ins. Studies show these chemicals, released in a gaseous state, mix with ground level ozone to create ultra-fine particulate matter, as well as formaldehyde, a known carcinogen. For problematic odors, try

absorbing them using the suggestions on page 1. If you choose to mask a smell, try a pump spray containing natural essential oils. Other tricks include boiling cinnamon sticks, cloves, or nutmeg on the stove. Avoid potpourri—most are covered with synthetic perfumes.



# LEAD FOR LUNCH?

—Melissa Cooper Vachon

Vinyl (PVC) is used to create a wide range of products from kitchen flooring and home siding to shower curtains and mini-blinds. You can even add children's toys and lunchboxes to the list. This soft plastic is appealing to manufacturers because it can be molded into a variety of shapes and sizes. It also lasts a long time. But, the chemicals that provide these attributes cause concern. Flexibility is achieved through hormone disrupting chemicals called phthalates (thalates) that soften vinyl. Surprisingly, lead, a known neurotoxin, is commonly used to stabilize vinyl.

While lead is no longer allowed in the production of vinyl in the United States, we still import vinyl products from China and other countries where lead is commonly used. This fact most recently came to light when children's lunchboxes in California were found to have lead levels 2-25 times higher than the state legal limit for paint in children's products. One in particular, the Angela Anaconda box by Targus International, tested at 56,400 parts per million (ppm) of lead, more than 90 times the 600 ppm state legal limit.

In New York, Superman, Spiderman, Batman, and the Fantastic Four were taken in for questioning as these character lunchboxes, along with others distributed by Fast Forward, LLC. were pulled off store shelves. The company recalled the products after the state Attorney General, Eliot Spitzer, found the lunchboxes to contain 21-81 times the state legal limit for lead in packages (100 ppm). Target and Wal-Mart are also cooperating in the recall; as of November 30, 2005 they pulled the Fast Forward lunchboxes off store shelves.

Children can be exposed to lead in lunchboxes when their hand or food comes into contact with the vinyl lining or outer portion of the lunchbox.

What should parents in Michigan do? If your child uses a vinyl lunch box, go to your local hardware or home improvement store and buy a simple lead test kit. They are inexpensive and easy to use; most will turn bright pink if a surface contains lead. If the lunch box contains lead you can send it to the Center for

Environmental Health, which will add it to their list of products to avoid. To avoid phthalates as well as lead use a paper or reusable cloth bag. A great resource for non-vinyl insulated lunch bags with fun styles is [www.reusablebags.com](http://www.reusablebags.com). Hard plastic and metal are other non-vinyl options.

Remember vinyl is not just popular for lunchboxes. Imported vinyl products such as mini-blinds and children's toys may also contain lead. Mini-blinds can deteriorate from heat and sun exposure leaving a layer of lead-laden dust on them. Children can be exposed when they touch the blinds and then put their hands in their mouths. And toys often go directly into children's mouths. Choose blinds made from wood, metal, or non-treated fabric. If vinyl is the preferred choice, look for blinds labeled: "New Formulation," "non-lead formula," or "no lead added." Natural materials are best for children's toys as well. As with lunch boxes, if buying plastic make sure the toy is hard plastic, rather than soft vinyl.

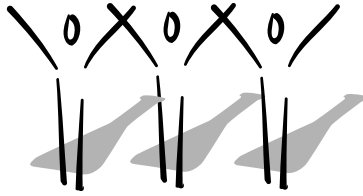
Note: Send vinyl lunchboxes with lead to: Center for Environmental Health, 528 61st Street Suite A, Oakland, CA 94609. Please include your contact information, when and where you purchased the box.

#### Sources:

Center for Environmental Health Press Release: A Back to School Warning: Children's Vinyl Lunch Boxes Can Contain Dangerous Levels of Lead. August 31, 2005 [www.cehca.org/lunchboxes.htm#release](http://www.cehca.org/lunchboxes.htm#release)

Press Release from the Office of New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer: Vinyl Lunch Boxes Containing Lead Recalled. November 29, 2005. [www.oag.state.ny.us/press/2005/nov/nov29a\\_05.html](http://www.oag.state.ny.us/press/2005/nov/nov29a_05.html)

ConsumerAffairs.Com Inc: Vinyl Lunch Boxes Recalled; Still Being Sold on eBay. November 30, 2005. [www.consumeraffairs.com/recalls04/2005/ny\\_lunch\\_boxes.html](http://www.consumeraffairs.com/recalls04/2005/ny_lunch_boxes.html)



# Join LocalMotion...

**...and help make our community a healthier place to live**

By joining LocalMotion as a member you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping our mission which is better health through fewer toxicants.

Through our outreach programs, including the annual Lecture Series, adults' and children's education programs; partnerships with health organizations; library resource materials; and working towards the goal of pesticide free public spaces, including schools and parks, LocalMotion has already made a significant impact on our community. *We need your help to continue this impact.*

Your membership at any level will allow us to continue this most important endeavor.

**Membership Level    Some ways you will help LocalMotion**

- \$35 – 50 + ..... Supports LocalMotion's mission
- \$100 + ..... Purchases activity packets for school children. Provides information packets
- \$250 + ..... Expands resource library materials. Sponsors production of lecture videos. Funds creation of a newsletter article
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**Membership includes:**

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- Use of library resources at our Grosse Pointe office
- Advance notice of special events
- Information packets for targeted issues (\$250 and above)
- Free admission to lectures and educational events (\$500 and above)
- Free evaluation of products used in your home (\$1,000 and above)

LocalMotion is a 501(c)3 organization. Your membership is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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**Please mail your contribution to:** LocalMotion 16824 Kercheval Place, Suite B100 Grosse Pointe, Michigan 48230

**Thank you for helping to make a difference in our environment!**

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**Eco-Friendly Home Renovation at the GP War Memorial**

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