

## ECONEWS #185

A monthly newsletter funded by your donations that dreams of a world blessed by the harmony of nature, the pleasures of community, and the joys of personal fulfillment, guided and protected by our active citizenship.

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### TREAT YOUR CHILDREN WELL

Let's kick off with the bad news – which becomes good news if we take the opportunity to act on it. There are things we've been doing over the past 20 years which seem harmless enough, but which are really bad news for our children's health. Here are five that have crossed my desk in just the last month.

**1. Call them Air Toxifiers** - those things you plug into the wall and suddenly everyone looks like they've eaten a pot brownie. What do we imagine they contain - angel dust? The Natural Resources Defence Council found that 12 out of 14 air fresheners contained phthalates that can cause hormonal abnormalities, birth defects, and reproductive problems – including those marketed as “all natural” and “unscented”. They may also contain allergens and cancer-causing chemicals such as benzene and formaldehyde. It is atrocious that they are sold at all, let alone as “all natural.” If you see them in a house with children or young mothers, please warn the parents not to use them.

**2. Call them Brain Retardants**. When the US-based Environmental Working Group tested 20 mothers and toddlers for hormone-disrupting fire retardant chemicals PDBEs in their blood, they found that small children had three times more than their mothers, and far more than newborns. The chemicals are sprayed into couches, chairs, and laptops at a rate ten times higher than in Europe, where the measure of fire risk is a smoldering cigarette. In North America, it's a blowtorch. PDBEs are toxic to the developing brain and reproductive system – and the reason why small children are more exposed is simply that they like to put their hands in their mouths. Once again, the chemicals should be banned. [www.ewg.org/reports/pbdesintoddlers](http://www.ewg.org/reports/pbdesintoddlers)

**3. Call it Chemically-Induced Obesity** There's also evidence that a baby's exposure to hormone-disrupting chemicals in the womb increases its risk of obesity. The suspect chemicals include fire retardants (as above), Bisphenol A (used to soften plastics and line canned foods), and pesticides – a Spanish study found that babies born with high levels of the pesticide hexachlorobenzene in their umbilical cords were more than twice as likely to be obese six years later as children with lower levels. It's just another reason why we need to ban the use of pesticides, without any further delay.

**4. Call it Television Surplus Disorder**. There are way too many kids being diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and placed on Ritalin for much of their childhoods. Something's clearly wrong

– but what? One of the strongest clues comes from studies that show that TV exposure in children aged 1-3 is associated with attention problems at age 7 – so much so that the American Academy of Pediatrics has called for children under two to watch no TV or videos at all, and older kids to watch no more than 2 hours a day. It's logical – a child's brain is still growing for the first two years of life, and TV images are several times faster than regular life. So the brain gets wired to think “this is normal”. Another study in the journal *Pediatrics* found that the more TV children watch when aged 5-11, they more likely they are to have attention problems when aged 13-15. No TVs in children's bedrooms. No TV whatsoever for children under 2.

### 5. Call it a Mobile Cancer Phone

Strong language? No. In September, analysis from one of the biggest studies into the risks of radiation, headed by one of the world's most prestigious cancer researchers, Professor Lennart Hardell from the University Hospital in Orebro, Sweden, found that children and teenagers under 20 who use cell phones are 500% times more likely to get cancer of the glioma, the cells that support the central nervous system. Those who use cordless phones have a 400% greater risk. Children who start using cell phones when young are also 500% more likely to get acoustic neuromas, benign but often disabling tumours of the auditory nerve which usually cause deafness. Professor Hardell believes that children under 12 should not use cell phones at all except in emergencies, and teenagers should only use hands-free devices or headsets, and concentrate on texting. After age 20, the danger diminishes because the brain is fully developed. A month earlier, the director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute sent a memo to all his staff with the same warning – children to use cell phones only in emergencies, as their brains are still developing. In July, Toronto Public Health issued the same warning, as has Britain's chief medical health officer. Now that the evidence is becoming more solid, the prospect of a future epidemic in which our children and grandchildren get cancer and lose their hearing is – well, extremely alarming. We need to take immediate steps to stop the growing trend for teenagers to talk

forever on their cell phones, and the mobile phone companies had better take out big-time insurance to cover the lawsuits that will be coming their way.

The German government has also warned everyone to stop using Wi-Fi because of the radiation risks it may pose, and the lack of research into its health effects. Schools, in particular, should take immediate steps to unplug their Wi-Fi systems because of the greater risk to children.

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### BETTER PLACE

OK – that’s enough with the bad news. Let’s shift to global warming, the world oil crisis – and Israel, where a smart entrepreneur called Shai Agassi has dreamed up a project called Better Place which will see the whole country being set up with electric vehicles (EVs) from Nissan-Renault, a nation-wide network of charging spots, and software that automates the whole experience. If your car’s battery is low and you need to make a longer trip, you just drive to a battery exchange station and exchange it for a new one. The Israeli government is involved, and the same is happening in Denmark, using excess energy generated at night by the country’s many wind turbines. Better Place is also negotiating in 25 other countries, involving many major automakers.

There’s a whole revolution brewing here. The German capital, Berlin, is gearing up for the installation of 500 EV charging posts around the city and 100 Mercedes-Benz electric cars powered by green electricity which will be available for public use in 2010.

Here in BC, where most of our electricity is green, a Better World EV network would work well in the Lower Mainland and southern Vancouver Island – but not elsewhere, since distances are too large. For that, we need to wait for the Plug-In Hybrid EVs that almost every major automaker is promising by 2010. In September, Chrysler surprised the world by announcing not one but four electric vehicles for probable delivery in 2010 – a Lotus-based Dodge EV sports car, a plug-in hybrid Minivan and Jeep

Wrangler, and the low-speed Peapod Neighbourhood EV pictured here, which will be officially allowed on the streets of Oak Bay.



### SAN FRANCISCO ZERO WASTE

Let’s take another problem our generation has created – tonnes of garbage, which we cram into holes in the ground. Here in Greater Victoria, our recycling rate has been *falling* for the last few years, not rising. We need to look south to San Francisco, which has achieved a 69% recycling rate, chasing 75% by 2010 and zero waste by 2020. What are they doing that we are not? They use a 3-bin system – black for regular garbage; blue for mixed paper, bottles, and cans which go to a state-of the art recycling facility; and green for food and yard waste, which they compost. They use financial incentives, so that the more a business recycles, the lower its garbage bill: the Fetzner winery has reduced its waste by 95%. And they have banned the use of plastic bags and take-away Styrofoam food containers – restaurants must now use biodegradable, compostable or recyclable containers. They have squads of friendly recycling missionaries who inspect people’s garbage and teach the gospel of recycling to any backsliders, and they have staffed the city’s recycling department with social activists, rather than engineers, which may be their real secret. What would it take to turn thing around for us in Victoria, and elsewhere in BC? Zero Waste activism, citizen engagement on advisory committees, a ban on compostables going to the landfill, and taking it out of the sole hands of the engineers, as San Francisco has done.

### GÜSSING GREEN

More inspiration to show what’s possible. Güssing is a small Austrian forest community of 3,800 people on the border with Hungary which has reduced its carbon footprint by an amazing 93% since 1995 (less flying).

They did it with leadership from the Mayor, and by engaging with local people – and engineers – to make their buildings much more efficient, and to generate heat, electricity, and vehicle fuel from forest wastes, sawdust, maize, cooking oil, and solar energy, all within a radius of 5 km, creating over 1,000 jobs in 50 new businesses, while turning the town into a magnet for 30,000 ecotourists a year who come to learn how they did it. The Güssing Energy Network includes more than 30 different energy projects, and the town now exports energy instead of importing it. Now they are planning to do the same for the wider area of 27,000 people. BC is full of forest communities like Güssing that could adopt a similar approach. The main obstacle might be the pricing, since Austrians pay more for energy, and have better funding for private power projects (IPPs). [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Güssing](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Güssing)

### REVIEW OF THE MONTH WRITING THE WEST COAST

#### In Love with Place

This collection of BC west coast essays is pungent with the smell of seaweed and the slapping of waves on float homes. “Each human is invisibly connected, like roots tangled in the duff beneath the ancient rainforest, a forest so vast and thronged with creatures that humans find themselves busted down from tyrant to citizen. Don’t let insignificance bother you. Out here, even the constellations get lost among the lesser stars.” That’s Andrew Struthers, one of our brightest stars. The whole book, edited with love by Christine Lowther and Anita Sinner, is a teleportation device that allows us to dwell inside in the hearts of storm-tossed, forest-loving west coast writers, sharing their secrets. And I’ve only teleported into a few of their hearts so far – I’ve got many more late nights of wet, wild, west coast pleasures ahead. This is why people want to protect and preserve. This is why they become so passionate. This creates a tiny re-opening to the world that existed before we humans came along, with our lists and tools and suburbs. “I cannot seem to stem my love for this Earth, or accept that humans as a species have no choice but to trash it.” (Helen Clay)  
Ronsdale Press, \$24.95.  
*No Action of the Month? No - we’ve got enough on with the federal election.*