

EARTH TALK™

Questions & Answers About Our Environment

Dear EarthTalk: I heard that some reusable bags contain lead. Is this a major health concern? Can't these bags be made to avoid such contamination?

-- Donald Young, Cincinnati, OH

It's true that some reusable shopping bags for sale in U.S. stores have been shown to contain lead-- a neurotoxin linked to developmental, brain and kidney problems.

The non-profit Center for Environmental Health (CEH) found that about 10 percent of the reusable bags it tested last year contained at least minute levels of lead.

Disney's "Toy Story" and "Cars" plastic reusable shopping bags topped the charts with excessive levels to the tune of 15 times the federal limit for lead in children's products. Tests by other groups confirm CEH's findings.

A November 2010 report by the Tampa Tribune newspaper found elevated levels of lead in reusable bags purchased at Winn-Dixie, Publix, Walmart and Target stores--and prompted an ongoing investigation by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) into whether or not reusable shopping bags could be leaching lead into food items that people later eat.

And earlier this year, the Center

for Consumer Freedom, a trade group that opposes bans on plastic bags, reported that some 21 different polypropylene reusable bags sold at Safeway, Walgreen's, Bloom and other stores had lead content above 100 parts per million--the highest level that many states allow in consumer packaging.

While the stores in question have pulled any such questionable bags from their shelves and in some cases stopped patronizing offending suppliers, consumers should take matters into their own hands with regard to selecting safer reusable shopping bags.

While plastic reusable shopping bags are a step in the right direction compared to disposable plastic or paper bags, they are still derived from petroleum, even if partly recycled, and may contain other contaminants, especially if they feature ornate designs or patterns.

The safest bet, according to CEH, would be cloth bags: Not only are they usually free of lead or any other potentially hazardous substances, but they also last for years and are



Plastic reusable shopping bags are petroleum-derived and may contain other contaminants, including lead, especially if they feature ornate designs or patterns. The safe bet is to use cloth bags, like the one pictured here from Eco Bags, because they are free of lead, they last for years, and they are easy to wash. (Photo courtesy of Eco Bags)

easy to wash. One quality, reliable source for cloth bags is the Ossining, New York-based Eco Bags, from which you can order conveniently online and pay no shipping costs on any order of \$100 or more.

Regarding washing to reduce or eliminate contaminants, public health experts worry that reusable shopping bags could become a breeding ground for impurities that lead to food poisoning, and recommend washing them every few uses at least to ward off contamination.

A 2008 Environmental and Plastics Industry Council of Canada study found mold and bacterial levels in reusable bags 300 percent greater than Canadian health standards allow.

And a 2010 joint University of Arizona and Loma Loma University study found that 97 percent of users did not wash their reusable shopping bags--which can harbor bacteria from repeated exposure to meats and vegetables. Half of the 84 bags studied contained coliform, a bacterium found in fecal matter, while

12 percent tested positive for E. coli. The moral of the story is to make sure your reusable shopping bags can go through the clothes washer--and then wash them a few times a month. This way you will steer clear of contaminating the food you and your family eat with trace amounts of lead, and as such you will sleep easier each and every night.

CONTACTS: CEH, www.ceh.org; Arizona/Limo Loma Study, www.uanews.org/pdfs/GerbaWilliams-Sinclair_BagContamination.pdf; Eco Bags, www.ecobags.com.

EarthTalk® is written and edited by Roddy Scheer and Doug Moss and is a registered trademark of E - The Environmental Magazine (www.emagazine.com). Send questions to: earthtalk@emagazine.com.

MULTNOMAH NOTEBOOK

(Continued from Page 4)

aries of House District (HD) 36 and was represented in Salem by State Representative Mary Nolan.

The new redistricting has divided up Multnomah into three house districts, HD 36, represented by Nolan, HD 35, represented by State Rep. Margaret Doherty and HD 38, represented by State Rep. Chris Garrett.

The Multnomah Neighborhood Association has invited all three state representatives to speak and meet their new constituents at our July meeting so please plan to attend to meet your new legislators and ask them questions about the process.

Editor's Note: Moses Ross is chair of the Multnomah Neighborhood Association. He can be reached via e-mail at mnachair@gmail.com.

POST A TO Z BUSINESS CARD DIRECTORY 503-244-6933

CZ BECKER COMPANY
WOOD FLOORS
A Family Owned Business Since 1982

- Restoration Repairs & Refinishing
- State of the Art Dust Containment
- Installation of New Wood Floors
- Environmentally Friendly Finishes

503.282.0623
czbecker.com

CCB #48132

Cuts & Chemistry LLC
Hair Design, Color Specialists

503-246-2077

6349 SW Capitol Hwy
Portland, Or 97239

Walk Ins Welcome
Open Tuesday - Saturday

Decks • Stairs • Rails • Trellises • Screens • Benches

DECKS

I live in the neighborhood. CCB#173192

Davis Hart • 503-888-4342 • DecksbyDavisHart.com

Julia Fitzgerald
phone: 503-244-6905
fax: 503-244-4569
julia@juliafitzgeraldcpa.com
www.juliafitzgeraldcpa.com
4620 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy, Suite B-4; Portland, OR 97221

Julia Fitzgerald, CPA, PC

A professional resource for your home business or small business.
QuickBooks® • Taxes • Business Development

SINCE 1962
HANDY ANDY

Handy Andy's Auto Repair
503-246-8497

7991 SW Capitol Hwy, Portland
Andy Anderegg, Owner

EXPERT REPAIRS
TOWING
Customer Service

Expert Repairs • Competitive Rates
We service most vehicles, new or old.
In the neighborhood for 50 years.

Customer Service Is Our Business

YOUR ONE-CALL REPAIR SOURCE
General Repairs **Free Estimates**

Plumbing
Electrical
Fencing
Locks
Drywall
Windows

Maintenance
Rentals
& More
Over 25 Years Experience
Licensed, Bonded & Insured
CCB# 193715

503-867-4225
www.TheHandymanPro.net

MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTING
Barbara Serrell Hansen
(503) 244-9936
SW Portland

Special This Month:
WORKING TOGETHER

www.no-nonsense-svc.com

Ann Slocum-Edmond
Optometric Physician

Heather Dudzik
Optician

Annie Wolf
Optometric Physician

HILLSDALE
EYE CARE
1522 SW SUNSET BLVD
PORTLAND OREGON 97239
PH 503 - 473 - 8039
FAX 503 - 473 - 8952
www.hillsdaleeye.com

KEITH DAVIS
CONSTRUCTION, LLC *Over 30 years experience*

- KITCHEN & BATHROOM REMODEL
- HISTORIC & WHOLE HOUSE RENOVATION
- DECKS, WINDOWS, MAINTENANCE & MORE

503.329.9212 | kdllc@mac.com
keithdavisconstruction.com | CCB#173455