

## Idealism, not Apathy

| [Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

WRITTEN BY PETER KOHT

THURSDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2006

One woman's quest to keep toxic chemicals out of drinking water In journalistic terms, you're only allowed to use apathy in two cases: Discussing voter turnout or high school students. So when some over-achiever comes along and ruins your preconceptions about the under-18 set, your thesaurus takes a bit of a hit. Rebecca Kassel hasn't yet graduated from Aptos High School, but already her future is bright. She's got State Senator Joe Simitian's office on speed dial, a passion for communications and more marketing savvy than most PR flacks who light up the newsroom line.

Kassel is concerned about one specific thing: The quality of drinking water. She's specifically interested in the impacts that unused pharmaceuticals can have on water treatment outflow. This is why she started the Teen's Pharmaceutical Disposal Proposal.

The problem of dangerous chemicals in outflow goes back to the nascent days of the pharmaceutical industry, when patients were advised to flush their unused pills and potions instead of placing them in the trash. While this kept morphine out of the reach of the trash collectors, it sent it directly to the water treatment plant. Though modern sewage plants do an excellent job of reclaiming water, most jurisdictions do not test for pharmaceutical products in their outflow stream, meaning that potentially dangerous chemicals re-enter the ecosystem at the end of the treatment cycle. These chemicals have possible ecological and genetic repercussions.

"I got the idea from my college counselor," Kassel tells GT. "She told me there was pharmaceutical waste in the water. Of course I wanted to know why there was waste in there. My interest just sort of got going from there."

With the backing of her father, a physician, and her mother, a nurse, Kassel began to dive through legal and scientific background information. She called pharmacists, water treatment plant managers and environmentalists, including representatives of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the Santa Clara Water Treatment Facility. Through this process, Kassel became aware that one state, Florida, managed to quell the pharmaceutical threat through sponsoring a take-back program in the state's pharmacies.

In order to solve the problem here in California, Kassel took her idea and contacted Sen. Joe Simitian's office in Palo Alto. She was told that her idea was perfect for the "There Ought To Be A Law" contest that had been held semi-annually since 2000. While the results aren't in yet, Kassel is taking a proactive route to lobbying. She's already set up a Web site and is actively trying to start a media campaign to generate energy behind her idea. "I want to make sure that this idea will move on and that there is public support behind it," she says. "I want people to notice."

Ideally, she goes on to explain, each pharmacy will have a tamperproof drop-off receptacle in the store. Consumers will have the opportunity to dispose of their unwanted medications in a safe way. When the receptacles are full, their contents will then be taken to a medical waste incinerator.

## RSS Feeds

Get your real



## Search

Search...

## Poll

Do you play a mu

(73 votes)

I learned when  
play anymore

Yes, several!

Nope, never

17.8%

Kassel takes pains to say that while this project looks good on college applications—that was not her original motivation. “When I find something that isn’t right, I want to do something about it,” she says. “I guess you would say that I’m environmentally involved and I think I’m really good about talking with people and getting my work out there. So if a problem or issue comes up, I want to do what I can to solve it.”

“This is an emerging story,” says Bill Kocher, director of the City of Santa Cruz’s water department. “The water industry is ever-vigilant when it comes to emerging threats; and endocrine disruptors and other pharmaceutical byproducts definitely are one.”

When asked about potential responses to the threat, which can also enter water through human waste, Kocher mentions that many water treatment plants are moving to membrane filtration instead of the standard routes to treatment. “It’s more expensive, but it is the best technology available to address these concerns,” he says.

While the extent of environmental degradation due to these chemicals hasn’t been adequately studied, even the threat of freaky fish is enough to motivate Kassel to do something about the issue. “These chemicals can kill fish and mutate wildlife,” Kassel says toward the end of our conversation. “This could lead to some species’ extinction. I need to do something.”

*More information on Rebecca Kassel’s project is available at [tpdp.awardspace.com](http://tpdp.awardspace.com)*



E-mail This



Bookmark

## Trackback(o)

[TrackBack URI for this entry](#)

## Comments (o)



## Write comment

Name

E-mail

Website

Title

Comment



Subscribe via e-mail (Registered users only)

[smaller](#) | [bigger](#)

security image ...

1200K

Write the displayed characters

Add Comment

Yes, but o

12.3%

Vote

## Sudoku

		3						
		4		7				
		9		6				2
								6
					5			
								5
2		1						
3								

Check %

Sudoku

SPONSORED LINKS

## Links

- [\\* Visiting Mont](#)
- [\\* Today's Vintag](#)
- [\\* Who Bought V](#)
- [\\* Site Map](#)

---

Add this page to your favorite Social Bookmarking websites

---

## Most Recent Comments

### Amy Kuney's journey to fame

she is so amazing! i love her for all those same reasons. she really cares about her fans and what they have to say shes just so aw

### Harpin' Jonny

Hello little brother, I'm in Santa Ana for thanksgiving and checking my mail when I found this....thanks for the mail. Hope you'll call you later. Love you Bro....and I'm so...

### 'The Wind in the Willows' a winner

A true gem, featuring superb directorial decisions, comically and simplistically focusing on the key elements of the book. This is theater filled with moments of exquisite joy and ...

### The Annihilation of Cynicism

Thanks, J. We certainly have much to be thankful for these days. I've been thinking a lot about this from Gandhi lately: First they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you wi...

### Workers get in UC's face over contract

thats great labor reporting! thanks elizabeth and good times!

## Top Stories This Week

- [New bicycle bridge almost ready](#)
- [The Annihilation of Cynicism](#)
- [Workers get in UC's face over contract](#)
- [Amy Kuney rocks The Abbey](#)
- ['The Wind in the Willows' a winner](#)
- [The Flexible Beatle](#)
- [Happy Tofurky Day!](#)
- [Harpin' Jonny](#)
- [Feast of Gratitude & Giving](#)
- [The Devil Makes Three working on a new album](#)

## Top Stories This Month

- [Six Ways We Can Still Fight Prop 8](#)
- [Tased and Confused](#)
- [No Home Room](#)
- [Pluto Enters Capricorn](#)
- [Scorpio & Financial Permaculture](#)
- [Ready For a Santa Cruz Dollar?](#)
- [Ghost Busters](#)
- [Naan the Wiser](#)
- [Lounge by the Pool Tables](#)
- [Santa Cruz Sandwiches caters to locals](#)

## From Our Archives

- **Smooth Cup o' Jazz:** Branford Marsalis: Mr. Artist in Residence
- **Cracking Up:** Local women team up for some laughs
- **American Nightmare:** Bret Easton Ellis takes on the horror genre in his latest and most personal novel
- **Long and Winding 'Code':** 'Da Vinci Code' intricate, but unconvincing
- **Power in Pollutants:** Albatross diets indicate that long regulated chemicals like DDT and PCBs are still common in ocean basins
- **Lit Listings:**
- **The Great 'Sphere:** Estradasphere braves nature's wrath on tour
- **End of Illusion:**
- **Ask the Chef:** In which, you ask, he answers
- **Without Error:** Quasi-local author Paul Goldstein goes head-to-head with John Grisham

### Latest Forum Posts

	Topics	By	Category	Da
	2009 NEWPORT BEACH FILM FESTIVAL-THANKS...	Newport	Community Bulletin Board	11-0
	Re:the latest lie prop 8 promotes	anonymous	News	10-0
	Re:the latest lie prop 8 promotes	were all equal	News	10-0
	Re:the latest lie prop 8 promotes	cmagyar	News	10-0
	Re:the latest lie prop 8 promotes	Scott	News	10-0