TOXIC PRODUCTS

Birds' respiratory systems are more sensitive than humans, and for that reason, bird owners need to pay particular attention to toxic fumes and other potential dangers. When in doubt, err on the conservative side to avoid putting your bird at risk.
Here are some things to avoid:
Fumes toxic to birds:
- Asbestos
- Cigarette Smoke
- Floor polishes
- House paint
- Moth balls
- Oven Cleaner
- Permanent wave solution
- Spot removers
- Surgical acrylics
- Overheated, non-stick cookware
- Bleach/Chlorine
- Formaldehyde
- Kerosene
- Nail polish and remover
- Paint remover
- Pesticides
- Spray starch
- Toilet cleaners
- Carbon Monoxide
- Diazanon
- Hair dye and hair spray
- Matches
- Oil-based paint
- Perfume
- Shoe polish and cleaners
- Suntan lotion
- Wax

Non-chemical Dangers that can be Toxic or Fatal:

**Fatty Diet.** In humans high fat diet has been shown to cause heart disease, liver malfunction, and endocrine problems (diabetes and pancreatitis). Birds do need more calories than mammals based on body weight, but 30-50% should be high-quality carbohydrates. Excess fat is either stored in the millions of liver cells or recirculated in the bloodstream. This overloads the liver and can eventually lead to liver failure. Sometimes this can be acute with the only symptoms being death or severe weakness, paralysis or seizures. Excess fat circulating in the blood stream can produce fatty tumors. Atherosclerosis also exists in birds with the associated heart maladies and circulatory problems associated with it.

**Alcohol.** This includes wine, liquor and beer. All are destructive to the liver. Because the bird has a high metabolic rate and the ability to ingest a much higher volume compared to its body weight, liver failure occurs in a very short period of time.

**Tobacco Products.** This includes cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, and marijuana. Chronic sinusitis, lung, and liver pathologies have been confirmed in birds housed with smokers. In any given breath, a bird can extract 70% more air particulate than a human. This added to an increased respiratory rate makes birds very susceptible to airborne toxins.

FYI: Did you know that it has now been proven that ETS (Environmental Tobacco Smoke) can cause cancer, bronchitis and heart disease in humans? ETS contains 43 compounds known as human or animal carcinogens. No studies have yet been done on birds, however birds' unique respiratory anatomy makes them highly sensitive to airborne toxin.

In conclusion: Many birds housed with smokers have been diagnosed with low grade infections, respiratory compromise, heart disease, skin disorders, as well as other nondescript symptoms. If you smoke, DON'T HAVE A BIRD!!!

Avocados. Research was done in 1989 to prove that avocado was indeed toxic to
birds. Budgerigars were the most susceptible with 6 out of 8 dying within 48 hours after ingesting one drop from a 1:10 dilution mixture. Avocado is also toxic to goats, horses, rabbits, cattle and mice. The toxic component has not been identified but... do not feed any part of the fruit, seed or tree to your bird.

**Caffeine.** This includes chocolate, tea, soda and coffee. These items tend to affect the body muscles including the heart with signs such as vomiting, restlessness or hyperactivity with more severe signs of a drunken-like appearance, muscle tremors, cyanosis, seizures and possible death from cardiac or respiratory collapse. This toxic group is dose related. Just because you might have given a product that didn't hurt does not mean that it could not be more serious next time.

Lead or "plumbism". Lead toxicity is well documented. Sources include lead-based paints, lead shot, solder, birds toys, linoleium, ceramics, curtain weights, stained glass windows, Tiffany lamps, glitter from trendy clothes, Christmas ornaments and foil from the top of wine bottles. Very small amounts are sufficient to create toxicity. Lead adversely affects all body systems. South American species, particularly amazons and macaws are acutely sensitive to lead poisoning. Signs usually show up several days after ingestion, but proceed rapidly and can lead to death within 48 hours. Symptoms can be vague, but usually have a sudden onset with one day the bird acting fine and the next day demonstrating weakness, anorexia or other neurological symptoms. If a bird suddenly regurgitates and looks listless one should seek veterinary attention immediately and have radiographs taken. Time is critical once symptoms manifest themselves. Antidotes are available to control the symptoms, then further medical or surgical therapy can be undertaken.

**Zinc.** Zinc poisoning has become more and more common in pet birds and is often underdiagnosed. Because so many products contain zinc as a component, clinical symptoms are quite variable dependent on quantity ingested, concentration of zinc, and species of bird. Symptoms might include regurgitation, lameness, mental aberrations, marked depression and sometimes death. History of ingestion has ranged from only a few days to chronic low-grade exposure over years. If your bird is a heavy chewer, replace all galvanized hardware with stainless steel as a precaution.

Common sources of zinc are: paint primers on cages, especially pre-1995, bronze coating on metals, galvanized products, anodized aluminum windows, costume jewelry and sequins, hardware products, washers, bolts, etc., post-1982 pennies, "hot spots" in colored food pellets, many forms of rubber products.

Other Heavy Metals. Various other metals are also toxic to birds. TIN: found in aluminum foil, gum wrappers and cans.

**Copper.** Certain toys, old pennies, designer furniture and home electrical cords. Iron. Found in rusted steel products. Just remember to be very careful where a bird roams in your house unattended. Symptoms in these other metal toxins are variable but most commonly present neurologically, gastrointestinally and concurrent with feather picking.

**Teflon Vapors.** When nonstick cookery (teflon, silverstone, etc) is heated above a critical temperature (530 degrees) an invisible, odorless vapor is emitted. The irritating vapors accumulate in the lungs causing fluid production and subsequent anoxia (lack of oxygen) with the only sign often being acute death, sometimes within 1-5 minutes. Birds seem to be highly sensitive to this toxin compared to other
animals or humans. The critical temperature is usually not obtained during the "normal" cooking processes, but may be reached when pans are used for searing meat or when using teflon-coated Chinese woks or electric skillets. To be safe, never keep your bird in the kitchen and be aware of which products contain teflon. Even products such as curling irons, hot curlers and portable room heaters have been known to have teflon in them and are potentially hazardous.

**Simple Sugars.** Foods like sweet rolls, danish, candy, glazed products, and even portions of sweet fruits have caused acute toxicity or death in some birds. The cause stems from the simple sugars causing a fermenting process in the lower bowel and a change from an aerobic environment to an anaerobic environment. Toxin-producing bacteria already located in the small intestines proliferate under anaerobic conditions with the ensuing signs of shock and/or death if antibiotics and fluid therapy is not rapidly administered. Unfortunately, birds have an affinity for these types of foods. Be careful!

**Acidic Foods.** A newly observed cause of toxicity in bird species is foods with a relatively low pH (acidity). Examples are oranges, tomatoes, raspberries or tart apple varieties. Small birds are again more susceptible since this is dose related. The symptoms are similar to sugar toxicity, but by a different mechanism. When ingested, acidic foods lower the pH in the crop and slow or stop the crop's normal function as a passageway to the lower gastrointestinal (GI) tract. This leads to the absorption of "normal" toxic food by-products, causing dehydration, depression, regurgitation, shock and sometimes death.

Conclusion: this is an overview of toxic compounds possibly available to your bird. If your bird ingests any of these products or suddenly does not seem right, contact your avian veterinarian immediately as only a few hours delay may make the difference between life and death.