

# AN “EARTH-SAFE’ ART MATERIALS WORKSHOP

## PURPOSE:

This workshop is designed to bring artists in your community together for discussion, awareness and possible action concerning toxins in art materials and their impact on the natural environment.

## PREPARATION:

This workshop can be facilitated by any interested person! Before assembling the group, you might send out the following materials to each participant:

- 1) A copy of “ARTIST ALERT! ARE YOU USING ‘EARTH-SAFE’ ART MATERIALS?”
- 2) A copy of “GUIDELINES FOR ‘EARTH-SAFE’ ART MATERIALS.”

Both of these can be obtained on the WEAD website: [www.weadartists.org](http://www.weadartists.org).

You can also recommend that people read the following books:

- 1) *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, by Michael Braungart and William McDonough.
- 2) *Conversations before the End of Time*, by Suzi Gablik.
- 3) *The Artist’s Complete Health and Safety Guide*, by Monona Rossol.

If you, the facilitator, have time to read these books before your workshop, you can find many valuable passages that could be copied for workshop participants to discuss.

Another resource is the magazine *Natural Home*, available at newsstands. Although not directed to artists, it will open up the world of natural, environmental architecture; and it is invaluable for artists to see the progress that has been made in architecture. It can inspire us!

## POTENTIAL PROGRAM:

Allow two hours for this program.

\*Begin the workshop with two important questions for the group:

- 1) Have any of you been concerned about toxins in the art materials that you use?
- 2) Have any of you or a friend experienced ill health effects as a result of the art materials that you use?

The answers to these questions are sure to lead to an interesting discussion! At this point you can note that some concerns about human health in the studio are being addressed and, due to artist pressure, the presence of toxins in the studio has been reduced.

However, the manufacture, distribution, and disposal of most art materials still cause harm to the larger environment.

## AN “EARTH-SAFE” ART MATERIALS WORKSHOP (CONTINUED)

- Read together from the “ARTIST ALERT!” handout. This handout provides much food for discussion. You don’t need to know the science to understand the problem! If you wish to continue with a broader, more philosophical perspective, you can add other readings, including passages from the books listed above.
- Read together the page “GUIDELINES FOR ‘EARTH-SAFE’ ART MATERIALS.” Review the art materials that participants actually are using. People who use Earth-safe materials already may want to describe what they use and why. Others might envision changing their present practices and using alternative materials that would be more Earth-safe.
- Pass around a copy of the magazine *Natural Home*, to show how the architectural world is changing in response to environmental concerns.
- Envision changes in your local art community. Brainstorm as a group. How might these be accomplished? Visit your local art stores and inquire about their products. Do they carry Earth-safe products? How can you encourage them to do more? Work with local art organizations and schools to raise awareness of these issues. Organize an exhibition for artists using Earth-safe materials. And more!
- Advocate for change in the larger art world. Brainstorm with your group on possible ways to do so, including contact with and pressure on art product manufacturers, art stores, art catalogue companies, and art magazines. (Encourage their use of recycled Earth friendly papers.)
- End your workshop on an inspirational note. One possible reading for this purpose is the quote from William McDonough (found at the back of the “ARTIST ALERT!” handout), “...if what we make with our hands is to be sacred and to honor the Earth that gives us life, then the things that we make must not only rise from the ground but return to it-soil to soil, water to water-so everything that is received from the Earth can be freely given back without causing harm to any living system.”

Good luck! Together, we can change to an Earth-safe art world!

Prepared by Linda Fries for **WEAD, THE WOMEN ENVIRONMENTAL ARTISTS DIRECTORY**. WEAD is an international group of artists involved in a wide range of environmental issues. For more information visit our website: [www.weadartists.org](http://www.weadartists.org).