



Safe Disposal of Household Hazardous Waste

Paints, cleaners and other household products are a part of our daily lives. We rely on them to help us care for our homes, cars, yards, and gardens.

Most household products are not harmful if used according to their labels and for their intended purpose. However, many do contain potentially hazardous ingredients. If unused portions of these products are improperly disposed, the waste could endanger human health and the environment.

What is household hazardous waste?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines "household hazardous waste" as leftover household product containing corrosive, toxic, ignitable or reactive ingredients. The EPA estimates as much as 100 pounds of household hazardous waste is accumulated in the average home each year.

Some examples of household hazardous waste include:

- **Corrosive Waste:** Can cause a chemical reaction that eats away at materials or living tissue. Examples: battery acid, drain cleaners, chlorine bleach, and oven and toilet bowl cleaners.
- **Toxic Waste:** Can cause illness or death. Exposure may cause symptoms similar to poisoning. Examples: antifreeze, pesticides, paints, photographic supplies, cleaning products, and many art supplies.
- **Ignitable Waste:** Can catch fire spontaneously or burn easily. Examples: charcoal lighter fluid, gasoline, kerosene, and nail polish remover.
- **Reactive Waste:** Can react with air, water, or other substances to cause rapid heating or explosions. Examples: acids that heat up rapidly and spatter when mixed with water, and chlorine bleach mixed with ammonia, which forms a toxic gas.

Improper disposal of household hazardous waste may include placing product in the trash and emptying contents down the drain, on the ground, or in the storm sewers.

What Can Be Done?

Although we can't eliminate the use of hazardous products, we can manage the waste.

Take the time to learn proper disposal methods in your community. For details, call your local environmental health, or solid waste agency. By following disposal instructions, you provide municipalities with the opportunity to remove products from the solid waste stream by obtaining them for reuse or recycling and to reduce the potential for accidental exposures to sanitation workers, materials recovery facility workers, landfill workers, and the environment.

Although each community may offer different options, the following are some basic guidelines for managing waste:

- **Follow manufacturer instructions:** Always read the label and follow manufacturer recommendations for use and storage. Some labels may also provide disposal recommendations. Don't mix household hazardous waste with other products as potentially dangerous reactions may occur.
- **Use it up:** Be a smart consumer and buy only what is needed. More is not better in the case of hazardous materials.



- **Donate:** Give remaining paint, household cleaners, or other products to a local charity, church, service organization, theater group, local housing authority, or even a neighbor.
- **Recycle:** Products such as automobile batteries and oil can be recycled at most places that sell them. Also, check with your local solid waste agency for additional community recycling options.
- **Save for a collection day:** Some communities have a waste collection day or permanent collection sites for household hazardous waste. Check with your local county, chamber of commerce, or state solid waste or environmental agency to find out if there is a collection program in your area.
- **Learn about alternatives:** Consider using some alternative products or methods that do not contain or involve hazardous ingredients.

Some helpful resources:

Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/muncpl/hhw.htm>

<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/househd/hhw.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Agricultural Safety Database

http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/menu/topic/home_safety.html

National Safety Council

<http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/poisoning.htm>

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