

Disposal Of Household Hazardous Materials



Household Hazardous Waste is any product that is discarded from a home or a similar source that contains volatile chemicals that are:

- **Ignitable:** capable of burning or causing a fire
- **Corrosive:** capable of eating away materials and destroying living tissue when contact occurs
- **Explosive and/or Reactive:** capable of causing an explosion or releasing poisonous fumes when exposed to air, water or other chemicals
- **Toxic:** poisonous, either immediately or over a long period of time
- **Radioactive:** capable of damaging and destroying cells and chromosomal material

Some examples of HHW are used motor oil, oil-based paint, auto batteries, gasoline and pesticides. The term HHW refers specifically to those products used in and around the common household, not used for any industrial purpose. These products can be harmful to the environment if they are not disposed of properly, which means they should not be dumped down the drain, and empty or partially empty hazardous waste containers should not be thrown in the garbage. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Americans generate 1.6 million tons of HHW per year. The average home alone can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of HHW in basements, garages and storage closets.

- **First and foremost, never burn or dump any hazardous wastes on the ground.**
- **Do not dispose of any hazardous material "down the sink"** unless you are sure it can safely be disposed into the sewer system. "Down the sink" includes letting hazardous materials run down the sewer system (draining an auto's oil into the gutter system or excessive water runoff from a pesticide treated yard) or down the toilet. If you have a septic tank, additional care must be taken.
- **Avoid burying any containers or leftover chemicals.**
- **Do not mix hazardous wastes** and do not collect containers and chemicals to dispose of them at one time.
- **Solidify any liquid wastes.** This involves using an absorbent material (sawdust, kitty litter, paper towels, rags) to soak up a liquid hazardous material. Do not solidify more than one chemical at a time. Using gloves, sweep or dispose of the material into a plastic bag, and then dispose of with other household garbage.
- **Use this same process with any "empty" container other than an aerosol container.** It is often good to "open" a non- aerosol container with wire cutters or scissors and air-dry; wearing gloves, swab the inside before disposal. Dispose of the rags or paper towels after they have aired outside.
- **Latex paint can be solidified by exposing the paint to air.** When dried, the paint and container can be disposed with household refuse. Wrap empty containers in several layers of newspaper prior to disposal. This prevents environmental contamination and reactive potential.
- **With aerosol cans, turn the container upside down and depress spray button,** with nozzle facing paper toweling, rags or any absorbent surface. When the spray has lost pressure, wrap the can in several layers of newspaper and dispose with household refuse.
- **Some cleansers can be poured down a drain.** If you have a septic tank, drain disposal should nearly always be avoided. If cleansers are designed to be used with water in a home or in sinks, showers, toilet bowls, and tubs, the material is probably drain disposable. Let the water run, rinse the container and slowly pour the water/chemical down the drain. Allow the water to continue running after the chemical is gone. Allow the container to air dry (or swab with paper towels), wrap in newspaper and dispose in household refuse.
- **Antifreeze can be flushed down the toilet if connected to a sewer system.**
- **Pesticides, herbicides, oil paints, paint cleaners, and oil and transmission fluids should never be flushed into a water system** or disposed of on ground or put into household refuse.
- **Automobile batteries should never be added to a home's garbage.** Some communities have hazardous waste material collection systems for some of these wastes.

An important note: Even when a container is "empty," it is rarely "empty" of all chemicals. There is some liquid that the pump won't spray and there is nearly always chemical residual on the sides and bottom of the container. Careful attention to disposal is imperative.

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS REMOVAL website is www.earth911.org