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# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet

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## Household Hazardous Waste

Household hazardous *wastes* are produced when household hazardous *materials* are no longer wanted or needed as household products. These wastes include unused paint thinners (flammable) oven cleaners (caustics) or bleach (oxidizers), and they can affect a consumer's health and contaminate the soil, ground water and surface waters. To make informed decisions when buying and using products with hazardous ingredients, you first need to identify which products in your home would be considered harmful to you and the environment.

### What are Household Hazardous Materials?

We use hazardous products every day in our homes. These products become a hazard when improper use or disposal will cause a threat to the environment or human health. Many common household products, such as paints, solvents, drain openers, oven cleaners, polishes, waxes, pesticides, cleaning agents and spent automotive products, have hazardous properties. The properties that make these products hazardous are:

- **Flammable.** Easily sets on fire or ignited.
- **Corrosive/Caustic.** Burns and destroys living tissue on contact.
- **Explosive/Reactive.** Detonates or explodes by exposure to heat, sudden shock or pressure.
- **Toxic/Poison.** Capable of causing injury or death through ingestion, inhalation or absorption through the skin.

### How do You Identify Household Hazardous Products?

To help you identify these hazardous products, federal law requires them to be labeled with warnings about their use, storage, and disposal. These labels include signal words to help you quickly identify hazardous products. The words “**Danger**” (most toxic), “**Warning**,” and “**Caution**” (least toxic) are used to help identify the various degrees of toxicity. These signal words, along with the properties that make the product hazardous, are listed to help you use these products safely. However, these requirements do not apply to most hobby products and typically do not inform you of long term health hazards. But, when provided, these labels provide valuable information that you can use to make informed choices about what products to buy and how to dispose of them if they become a waste.

### Why Should You be Concerned?

The average household throws 15.5 pounds of hazardous materials into the trash each year. Household hazardous materials are disposed of in other ways, too. Certain products, such as used oil, are frequently poured down storm drains and many products end up going down the sink drain to septic systems or sewers.

Flammable or reactive household chemicals can release toxic fumes or even explode if they are mixed together in the trash, causing fires or injuring workers. Dumping solvents into septic systems or landfills may contaminate ground and surface waters ruining drinking water and killing fish and wildlife. Pesticides can damage sewage treatment plants, and oil poured into storm drains can flow directly into streams and ponds.

There are also certain health threats associated with some of these products. Products like lye can burn skin, eyes or respiratory passages. Exposure to some pesticides, paints and solvents can cause weakness, confusion, dizziness, irritability, headaches, nausea, sweating, tremors and convulsions. Other repeated chemical exposures can cause cancer or birth defects.

Children are very vulnerable to these products and accidental poisonings can occur if these products are not properly stored. In New Hampshire, the third and fourth leading causes of poisoning are personal care products and cleaning substances. These substances should be stored safely and, if not used, disposed of properly.

### **What You Should Do**

To protect your family and the environment, follow these three steps.

#### **1. Buy Products Wisely**

- Read the label and buy non toxic alternatives or less toxic products.
- Buy only what you need for the job to avoid leftover product.

#### **2. When you do buy hazardous products, store them safely.**

- Close lids tightly so products will not dry out, evaporate or leak.
- Store products in cool, dry area away from sources of heat, spark or flame.
- Store products in original container with label intact.
- Separate flammables, corrosives, and poisons; store them on separate shelves.
- If a container is deteriorating, place the entire container in sealable glass or plastic container, surrounded with non-flammable absorbent, such as cat litter or vermiculite and bring it to your local household hazardous waste collection event.

#### **3. Use Products Safely**

- Read the label carefully before use and follow directions.
- Use only the recommended amount.
- *Never mix products.*
- Use products in well ventilated rooms and avoid breathing fumes.

### **What About Waste?**

Every effort should be made to minimize the waste. If you can not use the product up so there's no disposal, you might share what you cannot use with a friend or take it to a swap center if available. You may also be able to recycle the waste; most towns now accept used oil for recycling. Usable items, such as paint, may be donated to local service organizations.

If you still can't get rid of your wastes, don't burn, bury, pour on ground, pour down drain, or discard them in the trash. Some of these activities may even violate federal, state or local regulations. You should store these wastes safely and bring them to a local household hazardous waste collection.

## **Household Hazardous Waste Collection**

To prevent potential problems, household hazardous waste collection programs are available in most New Hampshire communities. Generally, collection programs are offered once or twice a year free of charge to residents of participating towns. By safely storing your hazardous wastes, and bringing them to your local collection site, you are making sure your wastes are transported and disposed of by licensed facilities in a manner which prevents environmental pollution.

For information on your town's next collection day, call your town offices, go on-line at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/p2au/pps/hhwp/index.htm>, or call (603) 271-2047 for more information.

Proper management of household hazardous products during use, storage and disposal should be everyone's concern. Your actions to reduce the use of these products wherever possible, to reduce the amount of waste generated, and to properly dispose of all household hazardous wastes will help safeguard your family's health and the environment.

## **Additional Information**

For more information regarding household hazardous waste, please contact [hhw@des.nh.gov](mailto:hhw@des.nh.gov) or call (603) 271-2047. For information on our website, go to <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/p2au/pps/hhwp/index.htm>.