

We've made some changes to EPA.gov. If the information you are looking for is not here, you may be able to find it on the EPA Web Archive or the January 19, 2017 Web Snapshot.



Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)

Related Links

- [Safe Management of Used Oil](#)
- [Collecting and Disposing of Unwanted Medicines](#)
- [Universal Wastes](#)
- [Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle Homepage](#)

EPA considers some leftover household products that can catch fire, react, or explode under certain circumstances, or that are corrosive or toxic as household hazardous waste. Products, such as paints, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides can contain hazardous ingredients and require special care when you dispose of them.

On this page:

- [Safe management of HHW](#)
- [Reducing HHW in your home](#)
- [Regulating HHW](#)

Safe Management of HHW

Safe Disposal and Recycling

Many communities have collection programs for HHW to reduce potential harm posed by these chemicals.

- Search for "household hazardous waste collection" near your zip code in the [Earth 911 database](#) EXIT for more information.
- Contact your [local environmental, health, or solid waste agency](#) to learn about permanent or periodic HHW collections near you.

To avoid the potential risks associated with household hazardous wastes, it is important that people always monitor the use, storage, and disposal of products with potentially hazardous substances in their homes. Improper disposal of HHW can include pouring them down the drain, on the ground, into storm sewers, or in some cases putting them out with the regular trash.

The dangers of such disposal methods might not be immediately obvious, but improper disposal of these wastes can pollute the environment and pose a threat to human health. Certain types of HHW have the potential to cause physical injury to sanitation workers, contaminate septic tanks or wastewater treatment systems if poured down drains or toilets. They can also present hazards to children and pets if left around the house.

Some quick tips for the safe handling of household hazardous wastes include:

- Follow any instructions for use and storage provided on product labels carefully to prevent any accidents at home.
- Be sure to read product labels for disposal directions to reduce the risk of products exploding, igniting, leaking, mixing with other chemicals, or posing other hazards on the way to a disposal facility.
- Never store hazardous products in food containers; keep them in their original containers and never remove labels. Corroding containers, however, require special handling. Call your local hazardous materials official or fire department for instructions.
- When leftovers remain, never mix HHW with other products. Incompatible products might react, ignite, or explode, and contaminated HHW might become unrecyclable.
- Check with your local environmental, health or solid waste agency for more information on HHW management options in your area.
 - If your community doesn't have a year-round collection system for HHW, see if there are any designated days in your area for collecting HHW at a central location to ensure safe management and disposal.

- If your community has neither a permanent collection site nor a special collection day, you might be able to drop off certain products at local businesses for recycling or proper disposal. Some local garages, for example, may accept used motor oil for recycling. Check around.
- Remember, even empty containers of HHW can pose hazards because of the residual chemicals that might remain so handle them with care also.

Reducing HHW in Your Home

Consider reducing your purchase of products that contain hazardous ingredients. Learn about the use of alternative methods or products—without hazardous ingredients—for some common household needs. When shopping for items such as multipurpose household cleaners, toilet cleaners, laundry detergent, dish soap, dishwashing machine pods and gels, bug sprays and insect pest control, consider shopping for environmentally friendly, natural products or search online for simple recipes you can use to create your own.

Below are some ideas to get you started. Additional information is available from [EPA's Safer Choice program](#).

Hazardous Waste Source Reduction around the Home	
Drain Cleaner	Use a plunger or plumber's snake.
Glass Cleaner	Mix one tablespoon of vinegar or lemon juice in one quart of water. Spray on and use newspaper to dry.
Furniture Polish	Mix one teaspoon of lemon juice in one pint of mineral or vegetable oil and wipe furniture.
Rug Deodorizer	Liberally sprinkle carpets with baking soda. Wait at least 15 minutes and vacuum. Repeat if necessary.

Hazardous Waste Source Reduction around the Home	
Silver Polish	Boil two to three inches of water in a shallow pan with one teaspoon of salt, one teaspoon of baking soda and a sheet of aluminum foil. Totally submerge silver and boil for two to three more minutes. Wipe away tarnish and repeat if necessary.
Mothballs	Use cedar chips, lavender flowers, rosemary, mints or white peppercorns.

Regulating HHW

Additional Information for State and Community Programs

- [Household Hazardous Waste Management: A Manual for One-Day Collection Programs](#)

While most hazardous wastes that are ignitable, reactive, corrosive or toxic in America are regulated in America under Subtitle C of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), Congress developed an exclusion for household waste. Under this exclusion, found in [Title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 261.4](#), wastes generated by normal household activities (e.g., routine house and yard maintenance) are excluded from the definition of hazardous waste. Specifically, wastes covered by the household hazardous waste exclusion must satisfy two criteria:

1. The waste must be generated by individuals on the premise of a temporary or permanent residence, and
2. The waste stream must be composed primarily of materials found in wastes generated by consumers in their homes.

State regulatory requirements for generators may be more stringent than those in the federal program. Be sure to check your state's policies.

EPA interprets this exclusion to include household-like areas, such as bunkhouses, ranger stations, crew quarters, campgrounds, picnic grounds, and day-use recreation areas.

Although household hazardous waste is excluded from Subtitle C of RCRA, it is regulated under Subtitle D of this law as a solid waste. In other words, household hazardous waste is regulated on the state and local level.

LAST UPDATED ON APRIL 12, 2017