



Lesson Resources

Hazardous Household Products

From under the kitchen sink to the garage and all storage places in between, a typical house has about 100 pounds of hazardous household products according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). If not used, stored and disposed of properly, they can be hazardous to your family's health and the environment.

What are hazardous household products?

Household products that are hazardous contain at least one hazardous substance – that is, any material that poses a threat to you or the environment. You need to remember that there are thousands of common household products that contain at least one hazardous substance. The products include cleaners, pool chemicals, lawn and garden care products, paint products, automotive fluids, medicine and some beauty products. Products that are hazardous have at least one of the following characteristics:

- **FLAMMABLE** – it can easily be set on fire.
- **CORROSIVE** or **CAUSTIC** – it can burn you.
- **EXPLOSIVE** or **REACTIVE** – it can explode if exposed to heat, sudden shock or pressure.
- **TOXIC** or **POISONOUS** – it can cause injury or death through ingestion, inhalation or absorption through the skin.

What is hazardous household waste?

Hazardous household waste (HHW) is leftover hazardous household products generated by residents as opposed to manufacturers and businesses. See examples of HHW on the following page.

What are the possible dangers?

The dangers may not be immediately obvious, but the improper disposal of HHW can pollute the environment and pose a threat to human health.

Flammable or reactive HHW mixed in your garbage can release toxic fumes, explode or catch fire injuring your family or sanitation workers. If poured down drains and toilets, it can contaminate septic tanks or wastewater treatment plants. If poured on the ground or down storm drains, it can contaminate rivers, lakes and streams.

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. Children are particularly vulnerable to these products and

What can I do at my home?

Here are some steps that you can take to protect your family and the environment.

- **Buy wisely.**
 - Read the label carefully. Make sure the product will do the job you want it to do.
 - Buy only what you need to avoid leftover product.
 - Consider buying non-toxic or less toxic alternatives.
- **Store products safely.**
 - Close lids tightly so products will not dry out, leak or evaporate.
 - Store products in a cool, dry place away from heat or flame. Store away from children and pets.
 - Store products in original containers with the label intact.
 - Separate flammables, corrosives and poisons. Store them on separate shelves.
- **Use products safely.**
 - Read the label carefully before use and follow directions.
 - Use only the recommended amount.
 - Never mix products.
 - Use the product in well-ventilated rooms and avoid breathing fumes.
 - Use any eye or ear protection, gloves and protective clothing recommended.

accidental poisonings can occur if these products are not properly stored. Pets can be at risk, too.

It may seem that what you throw away is insignificant, but it is not when multiplied by millions of homes nationwide that throw away HHW.

How can I identify a hazardous household product?

Carefully read the product label. To help identify these products, federal law requires them to be labeled with warnings about their use, storage and disposal. These labels include signal words such as “Danger” (most toxic), “Warning” and “Caution” (least toxic) to help identify the various degrees of toxicity.

It is important to note that some of these requirements do not apply to most hobby products. Labels do, however, provide valuable information that you can use to make informed choices about what products to buy, how to store and use them, and how to dispose of them properly.

How is HHW managed in South Carolina?

The waste management options in order of preference are waste reduction, reuse, recycling and disposal. Every effort should be made to minimize HHW. Using a non-toxic or less toxic alternative is the best option. If you cannot use the product, donate it to a friend or community organization.

Homeowners in South Carolina are legally allowed to dispose of HHW with their household garbage. There are some counties in the state that have permanent HHW programs. Other local programs offer single-day collection events. If your community does not have a program or plans for a collection event, encourage it to set up one.

Call the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control’s Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling at **1-800-768-7348** or visit www.scdhec.gov/recycle for information on programs or events. You also can visit www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/hazardous/hhwhome.htm.

EXAMPLES OF HAZARDOUS HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

- **LAWN/GARDEN CARE PRODUCTS** – Bug spray, fertilizer, pesticide, insecticide, fungicide, herbicide and weed killer
- **PAINT AND PAINT-RELATED PRODUCTS*** – Latex/water-based paint, oil-based paint, turpentine, paint stripper, rust remover, paint thinner and varnish
- **AUTOMOTIVE FLUIDS AND BATTERIES**** – Used motor oil and filters, gasoline, diesel fuel, kerosene, auto body repair products, windshield washer solution, antifreeze, brake and transmission fluid, lead-acid batteries and metal polish
- **BEAUTY PRODUCTS AND MEDICINE** – Alcohol-based lotions, rubbing alcohol, medicine, nail polish and nail polish remover, hair relaxers, dyes and permanents, hair sprays and aerosol deodorants
- **HOUSEHOLD CLEANERS** – Ammonia-based cleaners, oven and drain cleaners, floor care products, aerosol cleaners, window cleaners, furniture polish, metal polish as well as tub/toilet cleaners
- **MISCELLANEOUS** – Mercury thermometers, photographic chemicals, lighter fluid, shoe polish, fiberglass epoxy, swimming pool chemicals, mothballs and glue

* If the paint is still usable, try to donate it to a non-profit group in your community. Many counties also accept latex paint from residents. Paint also can be disposed of safely by completing the following steps: (1) Remove the lid and let the paint air dry (harden) completely. Make sure you do this in a well-ventilated area away from children and pets. (2) You can add cat litter, shredded newspaper, sawdust or sand to the paint to speed up the process. (3) Once the paint is completely dry, you can dispose of it with your household garbage.

** Used motor oil and filters as well as gasoline, diesel fuel and kerosene can be recycled throughout South Carolina. For the location nearest you, visit www.scdhec.gov/recycle and click on RECYCLING WHERE YOU LIVE. Lead-acid (car and truck) batteries must be recycled in South Carolina. You can recycle your batteries at the retail location where you bought your new battery or through your local recycling program.