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Hazardous Household Products

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Download date	2024-10-12 22:42:56
Link to Item	https://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/handle/10827/39341



Hazardous Household Products

Hazardous household products are in your home, your neighbor's home and your best friend's home.

From under the kitchen sink to the garage and all storage places in between, a typical house has about 100 pounds of them according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. 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. As a consumer, you might assume that a product is safe if it is for sale. 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 residential consumers as opposed to manufacturers and businesses. The average home can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of HHW according to the U.S. EPA.

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.

There can be certain health threats associated with the use of hazardous household 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. Children are particularly vulnerable to these products and 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 to help in their identification. The words "Danger" (most toxic), "Warning" and "Caution" (least toxic) are used 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.

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. To learn more about alternatives around the home, visit www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/reduce/catbook/alt.htm.

■ **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.

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 four counties in the state (Charleston, Georgetown, Horry and York counties) 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 more information on programs or events.

The Final Word

Proper management of hazardous household products and HHW is everyone's responsibility. You should reduce the use of these products whenever possible and reduce the amount of HHW generated for disposal. Your actions will help protect your family's health and the environment.

For more information about the hazards, handling and management of hazardous household products, visit www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/hazardous/hhwhome.htm. For more information about HHW, visit www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/muncpl/hhw.htm.

Examples of Hazardous Household Products Found in the Home

- **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. These counties include Aiken, Barnwell, Charleston, Darlington, Dorchester, Fairfield, Greenville, Hampton, Horry, Lancaster, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union and York. 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.



Office of Solid Waste
Reduction & Recycling
1-800-768-7348 ● www.scdhec.gov/recycle

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