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Is There Hazardous Waste in My Home?
Michigan State University Extension Service
Household Hazardous Waste Series
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IS THERE HAZARDOUS WASTE IN MY HOME?



Yes, there is!

Most of us think of the chemicals discarded by business and industry when we hear the words “hazardous waste,” but there are many hazardous wastes in our homes. Household products, often containing the same chemicals used in industry, become waste when we no longer want to use them. Proper use, storage and disposal of these household products — such as home and laundry cleaning supplies, automotive supplies and pesticides — are required to protect our health and environment.

WHAT MAKES A WASTE HAZARDOUS?

Hazardous materials may occur in gaseous, liquid or solid form. The degree of hazard that they pose depends on the chemical characteristics of each substance. Some of these characteristics are:

- How easily it catches fire, e.g., gasoline
- How acidic or caustic it is, e.g., oven cleaner
- How toxic the long- and short-term exposure is to humans and animals, e.g., pesticides, antifreeze
- How easily it leaches from a product, e.g., waste motor oil, paint strippers
- How explosive or reactive it is, e.g., aerosol cans
- How much oxygen or other gas it adds to a fire, e.g., hydrogen peroxide

WHY ARE THESE PRODUCTS DANGEROUS?

Improper use, storage and disposal of some household products may pose a safety hazard.

Some chemicals, if mixed together, can explode or cause a fire. Some products may cause severe injury or even death to children or pets who accidentally swallow them.

Containers stored over a long period of time may begin to leak chemicals and contaminate an area or pose a fire hazard. Reactions may also occur if different types of products are stored in the same area, even if they are not mixed deliberately.

Improper disposal of these products may pose an environmental hazard. Some household chemicals that are thrown in the trash, poured down the drain or dumped on the ground can contaminate surface and groundwater supplies. In addition, garbage haulers and other waste disposal workers may be injured by waste thrown in the trash.

WHAT CAN I DO TO REDUCE THE RISK FROM THESE PRODUCTS?

Ask yourself if you really need to use the product. Is there something else that would be just as effective but less hazardous? If you buy the product, buy only the amount you need. **READ THE LABEL.** Look for the signal words — Danger, Warning, Caution. They should alert you to the fact that these products contain hazardous chemicals.

Learn more about the products you use. Visit your library or contact environmental agencies or organizations to obtain more information. Follow the directions for safe use, storage and disposal.

HOW DO I DISPOSE OF THESE PRODUCTS?

If the product is usable and not banned from use, share it with someone who could use it. Be sure the product is in its original container with the label intact. Otherwise, take your household hazardous waste to a Household Hazardous Waste Collection location. Check with your local health department, city hall or MSU Extension county office to find out about programs in your area.

The following substances are generally accepted for collection:

- Pesticides
- Weed killers
- Cleaners and polishes
- Aerosols
- Wood preservatives
- Paint products—thinners, solvents, varnish
- Photographic chemicals
- Flammables — gasoline, fire-starting fluids
- Home repair glues, cements
- Asphalt and roofing tar

If your area doesn't have a collection program, check with the MSU Extension office for other disposal options.

ARE THERE PRODUCTS THAT A COLLECTION LOCATION WILL NOT ACCEPT?

Yes. Most collection locations will NOT accept:

- Used motor oil
- Latex paint
- Batteries
- Radioactive materials
- Explosives or unknown materials
- Wastes from business or industry
- Pharmaceuticals



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