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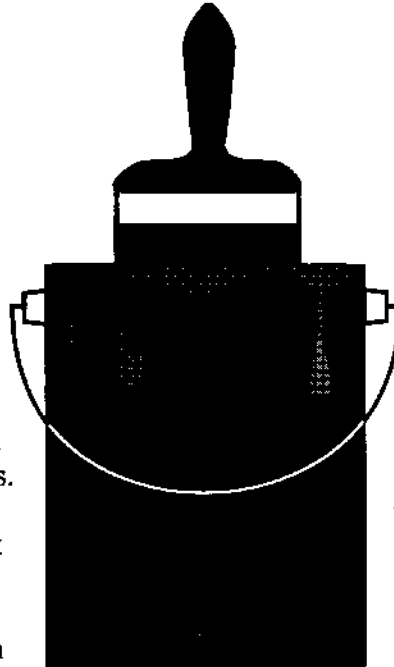
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Latex/Water-Based Paint
Michigan State University Extension Service
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LATEX/WATER-BASED PAINT



Paint is a common product that can become **household hazardous waste** when it is disposed of improperly. Paint can be divided into two basic types. If water can be used for cleanup, the paint is latex or water-based. If a solvent such as paint thinner, mineral spirits or brush cleaner must be used, the paint is oil-based. This fact sheet deals only with latex paint. Another fact sheet deals with solvents and oil-based paint (E-2553).

WHY IS DISPOSAL OF LATEX PAINT A CONCERN?

Although latex paint is less toxic than oil-based paint, it still contains potentially harmful substances. Since latex paint contains 20 to 60 percent water, it is very mobile in the environment. If disposed of improperly, it can be transported to surface and ground waters and pollute them.

HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT THE PROBLEM?

The best way to avoid waste is to purchase only the amount of paint you need. Most paints list the approximate coverage on the label. Measure the area you wish to paint and ask the clerk for assistance in purchasing the correct amount.

To reduce deterioration of partially used paints, replace the lid carefully (pounding it until it is com-

pletely seated in the groove) and store the paint can upside down in an area that remains above freezing.

HOW CAN I DISPOSE OF LEFTOVER PAINT?

The easiest way to dispose of leftover paint is to use it up for its intended purpose. If you do not have any use for the paint, give it to someone who does —

neighbor, friend, relative, community service organization, theater group or recreation department.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY PAINT IS USABLE?

If the paint appears thin and watery and resists mixing, it may have been subjected to freezing and is not usable. If it is very thick and lumpy, it may need to be thinned and strained before using.

WHAT IF I CANNOT FIND AN OUTLET FOR MY LATEX PAINT?

It is not necessary to take your leftover or unusable latex paint to a Hazardous Waste Collection facility. Instead, dispose of it according to the following instructions.

- Find an area that is protected from children, pets and rain but has adequate air flow. A stable shelf in a well-ventilated garage or shed may be suitable.

- Remove the lid and allow liquids to evaporate. Depending on the type and quantity of paint, the drying process can take several days to several weeks. This works well for small quantities (an inch or two in the bottom of the can) but larger quantities of paint take longer to dry and may require a different method.

In order to speed up the drying process:

- Apply another coat of paint to the surface you bought the paint for.
- When drying paint in the can, stir it occasionally to break the surface film, allowing evaporation to proceed.
- Partial contents can be solidified in the original containers by mixing in an equal amount of an absorbent material such as cat box filler, plaster of paris, oil dry, vermiculite or charcoal; allow to dry.
- Pour thin layers (about 1 inch of paint) into a cardboard box filled with plastic. Allow the paint to dry one layer at a time until all the paint has hardened.
- For paint that has separated and cannot be mixed, pour off the liquids on the top, leaving the semisolid paint sludge in the can to dry. The liquid can be poured into a cardboard box lined with plastic and mixed with an equal amount of an absorbent material and allowed to dry.

DO NOT

- **DUMP** paint on the ground or down storm drains, where it will travel directly to surface and/or groundwater.

- **POUR** paint down the sewer drain. While small amounts of latex paint can safely be washed down the drain to a septic system or wastewater treatment plant, this practice should be kept to a minimum. Limit this to brush cleaning and cleanup.
- **THROW** liquid paint in the regular trash. It may be released from the can when trash is compacted and may leach out of a landfill, contaminating groundwater.

HOW DO I DISPOSE OF THE DRIED PAINT?

When thoroughly dry, the remaining hardened material can be discarded with your regular trash. Leave the lid off the can so your garbage hauler can see the paint has hardened. In this form, the material is stable and can't seep through the landfill to the groundwater below.

WHAT IF I HAVE LATEX STAIN?

Most latex stains can be disposed of just like latex paint. However, some contain preservatives or pesticides that make them hazardous and require special disposal. Always read labels carefully and watch for the following words:

WARNING! Preservative, E.P.A. (followed by a number)

This means the product has been registered as a pesticide with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Products labeled with these words contain hazardous substances. Any leftovers should be taken to a Household Hazardous Waste Collection location.



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