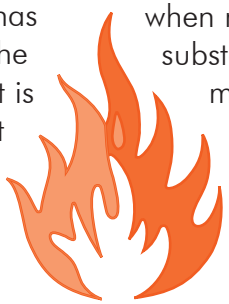
How to Handle Household Hazardous Waste

What is household hazardous waste (HHW)?

Any product which has the potential to harm the user or the environment is considered a hazard. It can be toxic, flammable (can catch fire), caustic (cause burns) or be chemically reactive (react or explode when mixed with other substances). Some of the most dangerous are pesticides, drain and oven cleaners, paint strippers and solvents, many of which are likely to be stored in your home right now.



What does hazardous waste do?

Because we are busy we are often looking for easy solutions to maintain our homes. We fill our shelves with convenience products which promise less effort, more time and a cleaner, healthier, shinier and better smelling place to live. But there may be trade offs . . .

In the long run, improper handling of these products may carry serious hidden costs:

- accidental poisonings of children or pets
- long-term illness
- risk of fire
- indoor air pollution

Why can't we just throw HHW "away"? First, there is no "away". One of the **worst** ways to dispose of many hazardous materials is to dump them down the drain, as wastewater treatment plants are

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not designed to handle certain types of HHW. And, disposing of HHW in a landfill can pollute the environment through the groundwater, surface water and air.

HHW products are sometimes corrosive. Acid leaking from automobile batteries can eat away many substances. Some are poisonous to humans or wildlife, while others can cause birth defects, cancer, or other serious medical problems. Dumping HHW into a storm drain is also dangerous, as it will find its way into a stream and on into the community's drinking water.

How do you know a household product is hazardous?

Look at the label. If any of the following words appear, the product is hazardous:

- warning
- caution
- need for ventilation
- eye protection
- gloves
- fire protection
- DANGER (extremely hazardous; one teaspoon could be fatal)

Facts about household hazardous waste

- In central Oklahoma alone 240,000 homes dispose of more than **two million pounds** of household hazardous waste (HHW) **each year.**
- The average home has from **3 to 10 gallons** of HHW.
- **More than 2%** of all garbage collectors are injured by chemical burns, explosions, etc. from HHW in trash.

- Certain unlikely combinations of HHW can be dangerous. **(For example, soft drinks mixed with swimming pool chlorine can ignite.)**
- Indoor air pollution is often **2 to 5 times worse** than the outdoors, even in heavily industrialized cities.
- It is estimated that in an average city of 100,000, **3.75 tons** of toilet bowl cleaner, **13.75 tons** of liquid household cleaners and **3.44 tons** of motor oil are discharged into city drains each month.

— Source: EHMI HHW Wheel

Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Options

Many Oklahoma communities are starting to schedule regular collection days for household hazardous waste. Contact your local public works department for more information. The following programs are regularly available:

- The City of Oklahoma City Storm Water Quality Division now operates a permanent facility at SW 15th & Portland. Call 405/682-7038 (For OKC and Edmond residents only)
- The M.e.t. in the Tulsa metro area holds two annual HHW collection days. Contact: 918/584-0584, or email: <metrecycle.com>
- Other communities that have begun HHW collections include:
  - Ada - trudy.nevland@adaok.com or Call 580/436-8100
  - Midwest City - Call 405/739-1352
  - Norman - 405/292-9731
  - Stillwater - Dgable@stiwater.org or Call 405/533-8482
  - Tahlequah - kpurdy@swino.org or Call 918/456-0116

Used motor oil is collected at a variety of service centers, including Pep Boys, Valvoline Instant Oil Change, Texaco Full Service Stations, O'Reilly's Auto Parts, Auto Zone and Walmart. Check with your local station, too, as many of them have started collecting used motor oil for recycling.

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OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
...for a clean, attractive, prosperous Oklahoma

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Rodent bait

Problem: Lethal to humans and pets in minute quantities, such as one taste.

Proper Disposal: Use up according to directions or take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternatives: Cats, traps, chopped bay leaves, cucumber skins, cola.

Insect repellent

Problem: Poisonous. One teaspoon may be lethal to an adult when ingested.

Proper Disposal: Use up according to directions or take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternatives: Screens, protective clothing, creams or lotions are occasionally effective.

Garden insecticides, herbicides or fungicides

Problem: Poisonous. Can persist in the environment. Especially hazardous around food plants.

Proper Disposal: Use up according to directions or take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternatives: Strong hosing or hand picking. Soap & water spray (aphids). Keep garden clean. Use “natural” insecticides (i.e., pyrethrins) or predators (i.e., lady bugs).

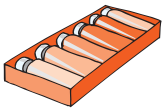
Drain cleaners

Problem: Poisonous. Can cause serious burns. May contain carcinogens.

Proper Disposal: Wash down drain with plenty of water or take to hazardous waste collection site.

Alternatives: Boiling water, plunger, metal snake.

Paints



Problem: May contain solvents and other poisonous chemical compounds.

Proper Disposal: Donate to someone who needs paint. Let it dry up before disposal.

Alternative: Use water-based (latex) paint if possible. Avoid aerosol sprays.

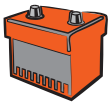
Lacquer, varnish, thinner and stripper

Problem: Poisonous. Solvent-based. Some are flammable and carcinogenic.

Proper Disposal: Use up according to directions or take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternative: None, except for stripper. Sand off old finish in well-ventilated area.

Automobile



Problem: Contain lead and are highly acidic (can produce serious burns.)

Proper Disposal: Trade in or recycle when purchasing a new one

Alternatives: Use public transportation, walk or ride a bicycle.

Oven cleaners

Problem: Poisonous. Can cause serious burns. May contain carcinogens. Spray cans are the most dangerous.

Proper Disposal: Use up according to directions or take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternative: Salt; quarter cup of ammonia overnight.

Toilet cleaners

Problem: Poisonous. Can cause serious burns. One teaspoon can be lethal to an adult.

Proper Disposal: Wash down drain with plenty of water or take to hazardous waste collection site.

Alternative: Mild detergent or small amounts of bleach.

Spot removers

Problem: Poisonous. Most are solvent-based. May be carcinogenic.

Proper Disposal: Use up according to directions or take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternative: Immediate cold water and detergent; rubbing alcohol or a little acetone.

Silver polishes

Problem: Include various poisonous solvents. One ounce may be lethal to an adult.

Proper Disposal: Use up according to directions or take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternative: Soak silver in water with baking soda, salt and small piece of aluminum foil.

Furniture polishes

Problem: Include various poisonous solvents. One ounce may be lethal to an adult.

Proper Disposal: Use up according to directions or take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternative: Mineral oil with lemon oil (but this may strip finish) or Carnauba wax.

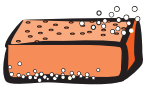
Cleansers

Problelm: Strong oxidizers. Poisonous. Can cause burns.

Proper Disposal: Wrap tightly in plastic, place in box, tape shut and take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternative: Baking soda and mild detergent, elbow grease.

Window cleaners



Problem: Contain harmful chemical compounds sometimes carcinogens. May cause birth defects.

Proper Disposal: Wrap tightly in plastic, place in box, tape shut and take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternatives: Vinegar and water.

Bleach and liquid cleaners

Problem: Contain strong oxidizers. Can cause burns.

Proper Disposal: Wash down drain with plenty of water.

Alternative: Use powder, not liquid bleach.

Dyes

Problem: Poisonous, especially to children; don't use cooking utensils when dyeing. May be carcinogenic.

Proper Disposal: Wrap tightly in plastic, place in box, tape shut and take to a hazardous waste collection site.

Alternative: Use vegetable dyes such as onion skins, teas, marigolds.

Wood preservatives

Problem: Produce highly toxic chemicals when burned.

Proper Dispoaal: Dispose of treated wood with other household garbage.

Alternative: Use water repellent whenever possible instead of preservatives.

Aerosol products

Problem: Containers may explode if heated. Contents may be highly flammable and contain irritants, corrosives, toxins.

Proper Disposal: Use up or give away. Hold for a hazardous waste collection. EMPTY cans may be put in trash. Some are even recyclable now.

Alternative: Pump spray, roll-on or liquid products.

Air fresheners/ deodorizers

Problem: Harmful to lungs if inhaled in high concentrations or for prolonged periods of time.Solid fresheners poisonous if eaten.

Proper Disposal: Dispose of non-aerosol containers in garbage or recycle.

Alternative: Open windows and doors for a few minutes daily. Locate source of odor and eliminate. Baking soda frequently works well to absorb odors.