

## HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE

A Public Service of the Churchill Area Environmental Council  
2300 Wm. Penn Highway, Pittsburgh, PA 15235. 1989

"IMPROPER DISPOSAL OF HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. FOLLOW DIRECTIONS ON HOW TO DISPOSE OF A PRODUCT. ONCE YOU BUY SOMETHING YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DISPOSING OF IT PROPERLY." Message on Alcosan bill, August, 1988.

Paint and paint thinner, drain, oven and toilet cleaners, mothballs, batteries and pesticides are among the dozens of household hazardous substances thoughtlessly dumped down the drain or sent to municipal landfills in the trash. These materials are gradually entering our water supply and represent uncontrolled and potentially serious health and safety problems.

The Environmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.) defines a hazardous substance as one which is flammable, corrosive, reactive or toxic. Why, then, are households permitted to dispose of such dangerous materials as if they were innocuous? The answer is twofold:

- 1) Households are exempt from the regulations of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (R.C.R.A.) and its 1984 Amendments. These are the federal laws that set standards for the disposal of even small amounts of hazardous wastes by industry or business. Under the provisions of this legislation, hazardous wastes must be inventoried, manifested and taken to permitted treatment or disposal facilities (Ohio has the nearest one) by licensed haulers.
- 2) Most local governments have not yet provided special "toxics collection days," nor has there been much public pressure to get hazardous waste management included in long range solid waste management plans currently being developed by the counties. Fortunately, most active landfills in Pennsylvania are carefully regulated and adequately lined to prevent or minimize leakage.

Each person generates an average of 27 pounds of hazardous household waste per year. A landfill serving 20,000 people (about the size of the Churchill Area) would thus accumulate 540,000 pounds or 270 tons of hazardous waste annually. It is no wonder that municipal landfills make up half of all E.P.A. Superfund cleanup sites.

Rain and melting snow become contaminated as they enter these sites and move through the soil, entering the ground and surface waters which are our vital sources of fresh water. A single gallon of gasoline leaking from a storage tank or container can contaminate a million gallons of water, making them unpotable.

How can a conscientious householder avoid adding to the hazardous waste stream?

- 1) Know which products are hazardous, Many automotive, garden, cleaning, maintenance and pool supplies are on the list of offenders. Check the "Reference Chart" accompanying this report for specific examples.
- 2) Think before you buy! Do you really need the item? Is there a non-toxic or less toxic alternative? You can substitute ammonia for commercial oven cleaners, spray with soap water instead of insecticide and use cedar chips in place of moth balls. Again, check the "Reference Chart."
- 3) If you do buy a hazardous chemical, buy only the minimum needed for the job and use it up! If a small amount is left over, perhaps a neighbor can use it. And if it must be discarded, read the label for recommended disposal instructions. Before throwing anything away ask yourself if you want it in your water. Aerosol cans should never be incinerated or put through a trash compactor.
- 4) Recycle! Take used motor oil and batteries to service stations. It is illegal to throw motor oil into the trash or to pour it down storm sewers.
- 5) Never mix products and never pour chemicals into different or unlabelled containers for storage.
- 6) Questions? Contact your County Health Department. For Allegheny County the number is 578-8026.
- 7) Get involved! Let your local government know you have an interest in this issue. Urge your county and state governments to establish "haz-waste" collections.

Hazardous chemicals are everywhere - in old and new products shelved in almost every household in America. But there are few rules presently controlling what happens to these products when they are no longer wanted. The responsibility for disposing of them safely lies in the hands of each consumer. The following materials are free or inexpensive and will provide excellent references for the home.

# HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE REFERENCE CHART

SUBSTANCE	PROBLEM	PROPER DISPOSAL	ALTERNATIVES
Rodent bait	Lethal to humans and pets in minute quantities, such as one taste.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Cats; traps; chopped bay leaves and cucumber skins
Insect repellent	Poisonous. One teaspoonful may be lethal to an adult.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Screens; protective clothing; creams or lotions are occasionally effective
Garden herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, etc.	Poisonous. Can persist in the environment. Especially hazardous around food plants.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Strong hosing or hand picking; keep garden clean; use "natural" insecticides such as pyrethrins, or predators such as ladybugs
Drain cleaners	Poisonous. Can cause serious burns. May contain carcinogens.	Wash down drain with lots of water or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Boiling water; plunger; metal snake
Oven cleaners	Poisonous. Can cause serious burns. May contain carcinogens. Spray cans the most dangerous.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Salt; quarter cup of ammonia overnight
Toilet cleaners	Poisonous. Can cause serious burns. One teaspoonful may be lethal to an adult.	Wash down drain with lots of water.	Mild detergent or small amounts of bleach
Spot removers	Poisonous. Most are solvent-based. May be carcinogenic.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Immediate cold water and detergent; rubbing alcohol; or a little acetone
Silver polishes	Poisonous. May contain carcinogens. One ounce may be lethal to an adult.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Soak silver in water with baking soda, salt, and small piece of aluminum foil
Furniture polishes	Include various poisonous solvents. One ounce may be lethal to an adult.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Mineral oil with lemon oil (but this may strip finish) or Carnuba wax
Cleansers and powder cleaners	Strong oxidizers. Poisonous. Can cause burns.	Wrap tightly in plastic, place in a box, tape shut, and put in garbage.	Baking soda and mild detergent; elbow grease
Window cleaners	Contain harmful chemical compounds and sometimes carcinogens. May cause birth defects.	Wrap tightly in plastic, place in a box, tape shut, and put in garbage.	Vinegar and water
Mothballs	Contain poisonous chemical compounds.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	Cedar chips; newspapers; wrap wool clothing in plastic bags during warm seasons
Bleach & liquid cleaners	Contain strong oxidizers. Can cause burns.	Wash down drain with lots of water.	Use powder, not liquid bleach
Dyes	Poisonous, especially to kids; don't use cooking utensils when dyeing. May be carcinogenic.	Wrap tightly in plastic, place in a box, tape shut, and put in garbage.	Use vegetable dyes such as onion skins, teas, marigolds
Mercury from thermometers, fluorescent light bulbs and silent switches	Poisonous to inhale or ingest. Can lead to kidney damage and memory loss.	Never incinerate. Take or send to a mercury or chemical supply company or hazardous waste collector.	None. Avoid breaking mercury thermometers and barometers.
Gasoline/oil mixes from power mowers and snow throwers	Contain poisonous hydrocarbons and additives. Toxic in water supplies.	Run the machine until dry, or drain fuel at season's end and take it to a service station for recycling.	None; avoid buying more than needed
Motor oil, brake & transmission fluid	Contain poisonous chemical compounds. Oil also has lead, other metals. Fluid may be lethal.	Take to service station or local waste-oil recycling center.	None
Antifreeze	Sweet-tasting, poisonous, may be lethal; don't leave puddles where kids, pets can get to them.	Wash down drain with lots of water.	None
Car batteries	Contain lead and are highly acidic (can produce serious burns).	Trade in or take to special recycling center (see phone book).	None
Paints*	Contain solvents and other poisonous chemical compounds.	Tightly wrap residue and place in garbage or donate to someone who needs paint.	None; use water-based (latex) paint if possible; avoid aerosol sprays
Lacquer, varnish, thinner, & stripper	Poisonous. Solvent-based. Some are flammable and carcinogenic.	Use up according to directions or take to hazardous-waste collection site.	None; except for stripper, sand off old finish in well-ventilated area

PESTICIDES & HERBICIDES

HOME & PERSONAL PRODUCTS

AUTOMOTIVE & PAINT PRODUCTS

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE WHEEL - a handy tool available in quantities of 10 or more for \$2.25 each from The Environmental Hazards Management Institute, 10 Newmarket Rd., P.O. Box 932F, Durham, NH 03824.

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE KIT - contains a useful waste audit form and stickers. Send \$3.75 to The Garden Club Federation of Pa., 103 Woodstone Ln. #41, New Kensington, PA 15068.

HAZARDOUS WASTE - WHAT YOU SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T DO - a brochure with a colorful wall chart. Available for \$.25. Send a stamped, legal-size envelope to The Water Pollution Control Federation, 601 Wylie St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

A GUIDE TO HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE - a booklet available from The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 412 N. 2nd St., Harrisburg, PA 17101.

Sources: Citizens for a Better Environment; Soline Bonds; Bonds Environmental Research, Inc.