

## Household Hazardous Waste

*Household hazardous waste* is produced when household hazardous materials are no longer wanted or needed as household products. These wastes can affect a consumer's health and contaminate the soil, ground water, and surface waters. To make informed decisions when buying and using products with hazardous ingredients, you first need to identify which products in your home would be considered harmful to you and the environment.

### What are Household Hazardous Materials?

We use hazardous products every day in our homes. These products become a hazard when improper use or disposal will cause a threat to the environment or human health. The properties that make these products hazardous are:

- **Flammable.** Easily sets on fire or ignited.
- **Corrosive/Caustic.** Burns and destroys living tissue on contact.
- **Explosive/Reactive.** Detonates or explodes by exposure to heat, sudden shock or pressure.
- **Toxic/Poison.** Capable of causing injury or death through ingestion, inhalation, or absorption through the skin.

### Why Should You be Concerned?

The average household throws 15.5 pounds of hazardous materials into the trash each year. Household hazardous materials are disposed of in other ways, too. Certain products, such as used oil, are frequently poured down storm drains and many products end up going down the sink drain to septic systems or sewers.

Flammable or reactive household chemicals can release toxic fumes or even explode if they are mixed together in the trash, causing fires or injuring workers. Dumping solvents into septic systems or landfills may contaminate ground and surface waters, ruining drinking water and killing fish and wildlife. Pesticides can damage sewage treatment plants, and oil poured into storm drains can flow directly into streams and ponds.

There are also certain health threats associated with some of these 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. Other repeated chemical exposures can cause cancer or birth defects.

Children are very vulnerable to these products and accidental poisonings can occur if these products are not properly stored. In New Hampshire, the third and fourth leading causes of poisoning are personal care products and cleaning substances. These substances should be stored safely and, if not used, disposed of properly.

Proper management of household hazardous products during use, storage, and disposal should be everyone's concern. Your actions to reduce the use of these products wherever possible, to reduce the amount of waste generated, and to properly dispose of all household hazardous wastes will help safeguard your family's health and the environment.

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### What You Should Do

To protect your family and the environment, follow these three steps.

1. Buy Products Wisely
  - Read the label and buy (or make) non-toxic alternatives or less toxic products.
  - Buy only what you need for the job to avoid leftover product.
2. When you do buy hazardous products, store them safely.
  - Close lids tightly so products will not dry out, evaporate, or leak.
  - Store products in cool, dry area away from sources of heat, spark, or flame.
  - Store products in original container with label intact.
  - Separate flammables, corrosives, and poisons; store them on separate shelves.
  - If a container is deteriorating, place the entire container in sealable glass or plastic container, surrounded with non-flammable absorbent, such as cat litter or vermiculite, and bring it to your local household hazardous waste collection event.
3. Use Products Safely
  - Read the label carefully before use and follow directions.
  - Use only the recommended amount.
  - Never mix products.
  - Use products in well ventilated rooms and avoid breathing fumes.

### Household Hazardous Waste Collection

To prevent potential problems, household hazardous waste collection programs are available in most New Hampshire communities. Generally, collection programs are offered once or twice a year free of charge to residents of participating towns. By safely storing your hazardous wastes, and bringing them to your local collection site, you are making sure your wastes are transported and disposed of by licensed facilities in a manner which prevents environmental pollution.

For information on Chester's next collection day, call your Town Offices, go on-line at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/p2au/pps/hhwp/index.htm>, or call (603) 271-2047 for more information.

### Additional Information

For more information regarding household hazardous waste, please contact [hhw@des.nh.gov](mailto:hhw@des.nh.gov), call (603) 271-2047, or go to <http://des.nh.gov/>.