

## Pollution Prevention Starts With You

**D**id you know the average household contains between three and ten gallons of materials that are hazardous to human health or to the natural environment? There are obvious things, such as paint thinner, car batteries, and cleaners, but beyond clearly hazardous materials, substances such as polishes, greases, and even prescription medicines and personal care products can affect the environment if disposed of improperly. Every time someone dumps a can of paint thinner down the sink, flushes medicine down the toilet or throws an old car battery out with the trash, they can impact our water quality—and it doesn't have to happen. You can prevent pollution before it starts through proper disposal, educated product choices, and the desire to contribute to sustainability or the continued environmental health of our planet.

### What Is A Hazardous Material?

Many government environmental agencies consider a substance hazardous if it can catch fire, react or explode when mixed with other substances, if it is corrosive, or if it is toxic. This definition includes many things that you probably are storing right now in your garage, basement, bathroom, or kitchen. And while they aren't considered technically hazardous, other common household materials such as fats, oils and greases can cause serious damage to your wastewater treatment system and the environment.

The improper disposal of household wastes can cause problems for the entire community. Wastes can be explosive or highly flammable. Sewers have exploded and garbage trucks have burned because people have carelessly discarded flammable or reactive wastes. Wastewater infrastructure has been clogged by fats, oils and greases. And water quality can be affected by improper disposal of medicines and personal care products.

### Where Do We Put Them?

One of the worst ways to dispose of many household wastes is to "just dump them down the drain." Wastewater treatment plants and septic systems are not designed to handle most hazardous wastes.

Moreover, disposing of such wastes in a landfill is not an effective solution. Without special design, sanitary landfills are not equipped to accept hazardous wastes, and when they are sent to landfills, hazardous wastes can pollute the environment through the groundwater, surface water and air.

If the public cannot dispose of most wastes in the sewer system or a landfill, what can be done? This brochure describes some preventive measures you can take in your home to reduce the quantity of waste you generate. The Household Waste Chart inside shows you ways of dealing with most common waste materials found in the home.

### What You Can Do in Your Community

Community members can work together to plan and create effective systems for managing wastes. Many communities sponsor household hazardous wastes collection days. These efforts help reduce the amount of hazardous waste and build public awareness of the problem.

Successful collection efforts in many cities help officials protect their local wastewater treatment plants and groundwater from hazardous waste contamination. Many communities are able to collect large quantities of hazardous materials in just a one or two-day program.

If your community has a program for disposal of hazardous wastes, please support it. If not, we encourage you to speak to local officials about starting one.

We also encourage you to:

- Learn as much as you can about your wastewater treatment plant and share that information with your family and friends. Clean water is for everyone.
- Learn about your community's landfill system and special programs for the disposal of hazardous wastes. If you have the time, get involved in your community's programs.
- Contact your area's hazardous waste agency. They can provide information on companies which are licensed to handle hazardous wastes along with possible funding sources for such efforts.



## Thinking Ahead to a Sustainable Future

Billions of dollars have been spent to improve wastewater treatment facilities and clean up our lakes and streams. Many millions more have been spent to build and maintain adequate sanitary landfills. Despite these protective measures, we cannot just discharge our wastes into the sink or send them to a landfill without thinking about the eventual environmental consequences. If it goes down your sink or into your trash, it goes into the environment!

That's why it's so important to think about how you dispose of household waste. When it comes to cleaner water and a healthier environment, sustainability really does start at your sink.

The Water Environment Federation assumes no responsibility and disclaims any liability for any injury or damage resulting from the use or effect of any product or information in this publication. The information contained in this pamphlet is intended as a general guideline. Laws and regulations may vary from state to state. Additionally, product formulation can change over time. Be sure to check the manufacturer's label for specific disposal guidelines. Above all, use common sense!



601 Wythe Street  
Alexandria, Virginia  
22314-1994 USA

Tel. 1-800-666-0206  
Fax. 1-703-684-2492  
www.wef.org

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## Sustainability starts at your sink.

### How To Dispose of Household Waste



**Do Your Part for A Sustainable Planet!  
Here's How to Manage Household Waste**

**FIRST: REDUCE THE AMOUNT**

You can reduce the amount of wastes from your home by simply reducing the amount you need. Here are some suggestions to help:

- Before you buy a product, read the label and make sure that it will do what you want. Once you buy something, you are responsible for disposing of it properly.
- Do not buy more than you need. That way you will not need to dispose of the surplus.
- Read and follow directions on how to use a product and how to dispose of the container. (There is a good reason why the labels say "do not incinerate" or "do not mix with bleach;" serious injury or even death can result)
- Use safer or environmentally friendlier substitutes when available.

**SECOND: TAKE CARE OF THE WASTES**

Even if you reduce your wastes, there is still the question of what to do with what is left over. Recycling is an excellent way of handling some hazardous wastes. Used motor oil, paint thinners, and some other solvents can be refined and reused just as aluminum cans are. Local civic groups can help you identify recycling programs.

Municipal or commercial incineration is another effective way to deal with some hazardous wastes. However, a specially designed incinerator is needed to destroy hazardous materials. "Incinerators" at your home, such as your fireplace, woodstove, or "burn barrel", cannot get hot enough to destroy hazardous wastes and should never be used for that purpose.

Take your hazardous household wastes to a licensed contractor or recycling agency, which can be found on the Internet. If such a group does not exist near you, your local wastewater treatment operator may be able to give you more information on the disposal of liquid wastes. Your local sanitation department may be able to give you more information on the disposal of solid wastes.

This Household Waste Chart will guide you in disposing of potentially hazardous materials and waste found around your home. You should display this chart in a convenient location. Remember never to dump hazardous wastes on the ground or down the drain. Always check the chart before disposing of waste.

**HOUSEHOLD WASTE CHART\***

The following chart from the Water Environment Federation will show you effective ways to dispose of household waste and contribute to a sustainable clean environment.

Blue waves ≈ indicate products which can be poured down the drain with plenty of water. If you have a septic tank, additional caution should be exercised when dumping these items down the drain. In fact, because septic systems rely on healthy bacteria, there are certain chemical substances that cannot be used with them. Be sure to read the labels to determine if a product could damage septic systems.

KITCHEN	TYPE OF WASTE DISPOSAL			
Aluminum cleaners		▼		
Ammonia-based cleaners	≈			
Bug sprays			⊗	
Drain cleaners			⊗	
Egg shells		▼		
Floor care products			⊗	
Furniture polish			⊗	
Metal polish with solvent			⊗	
Window cleaner		▼		
Oven cleaner (lye base)			⊗	
Fats, oils and grease (including oil from turkey fryers)		▼		
BATHROOM	TYPE OF WASTE DISPOSAL			
Bathroom cleaners		▼		
Diapers (baby wipes)		▼		
Disinfectants		▼		
Toilet bowl cleaner		▼		
Tub and tile cleaners			⊗	
Pharmaceutical products or drugs (expired or used)		▼		
Personal care products (aftershave, perfumes, depilatories, permanent or other lotions, hair relaxers, nail polish, dyes, waxes)		▼		
Sharps (needles for diabetics)			⊗	
GARDEN	TYPE OF WASTE DISPOSAL			
Fertilizer			⊗	
Fungicide			⊗	
Herbicide			⊗	
Insecticide			⊗	
Rat poison			⊗	
Weed killer			⊗	

Yellow triangles ▼ indicate materials which should not be poured down the drain, but can be safely disposed of in a sanitary landfill or incinerator. Note that medicines can often be taken to a community drug take-back program or mixed with undesirable substances such as kitty litter or coffee grounds. Pills (except narcotics) can also be dissolved and mixed with regular trash. Be sure the material is properly contained before it is put out for collection or carried to the landfill. The red octagons ⊗ indicate hazardous wastes or materials that should be saved for a community-wide collection day or given to a licensed hazardous waste contractor when left over or unused. (Even the empty containers should be taken to a licensed contractor if one is available.)

GARAGE	TYPE OF WASTE DISPOSAL			
Antifreeze			⊗	♻️
Automatic transmission fluid			⊗	♻️
Auto body repair products			⊗	
Battery acid (or battery)			⊗	♻️
Brake fluid			⊗	
Car wax with solvent			⊗	
Diesel fuel			⊗	♻️
Fuel additives			⊗	
Fuel oil			⊗	♻️
Gasoline			⊗	♻️
Kerosene			⊗	♻️
Metal polish with solvent			⊗	
Motor oil			⊗	♻️
Other oils			⊗	
WORKSHOP	TYPE OF WASTE DISPOSAL			
Cutting oil			⊗	
Deck cleaners/stains			⊗	
Glue (solvent based)			⊗	
Glue (water based)	≈			
Paint (latex)		▼		♻️
Paint (oil based)			⊗	
Paint (auto)			⊗	
Paint (model)			⊗	
Paint brush cleaner with solvent			⊗	♻️
Paint brush cleaner with TSP	≈			
Paint stripper			⊗	
Paint stripper (lye base)			⊗	
Paint thinner			⊗	♻️
Primer			⊗	
Rust remover (with phosphoric acid)			⊗	

Green leaves ♻️ indicate material that can be recycled or reused or shared with neighbors or family members. If there is a recycling program in your area, take the materials there. If not, encourage local officials to start a recycling program.

**\*The information contained in this chart is intended as a general guideline. Laws and regulations may vary from state to state. For more information on the safest way to dispose of these and other products, contact your area's solid and hazardous waste department or federal or state environmental agency. Check manufacturer's label for specific disposal guidelines.**

WORKSHOP, Cont.	TYPE OF WASTE DISPOSAL			
Turpentine			⊗	♻️
Varnish			⊗	
Wood preservative			⊗	
MISCELLANEOUS	TYPE OF WASTE DISPOSAL			
Aerosol cans (empty)		▼		♻️
Aerosol cans (not empty)			⊗	
Ammunition			⊗	
Artists' paints (acrylic)		▼		♻️
Artists' paints (oil based)			⊗	
Cat litter		▼		
Cellular phones			⊗	♻️
Dry cleaning solvents			⊗	♻️
Fiberglass epoxy			⊗	
Gun cleaning solvents			⊗	♻️
Lighter fluid			⊗	
Mercury batteries			⊗	♻️
Moth balls			⊗	
Old fire alarms			⊗	
Fluorescent light bulbs			⊗	
Pet care products (flea and tick repellent)		▼		
Photographic chemicals			⊗	
Shoe polish			⊗	
Swimming pool chemicals			⊗	
White-out (used for corrections)		▼		

- ≈ - Can be poured down the drain with plenty of water.
- ▼ - Cannot be poured down the drain, but can be safely disposed of in a sanitary landfill or incinerator.
- ⊗ - Hazardous wastes.
- ♻️ - Recycle, reuse, or share.