

Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home

PAINT AND OTHER HOME IMPROVEMENT PRODUCTS

by Elaine Andrews

GENERAL INFORMATION

Many home improvement products are flammable. In many areas residents are not permitted to throw away flammable materials in the garbage, down home drains or down storm water sewers. Many home improvement products are not appropriate for septic system disposal. Most products included in this brochure are also toxic or poisonous and some may have long-term health effects and/or are suspected carcinogens. These products may pose a health hazard during use and may pollute drinking water, if you dispose of them improperly.

This publication explains the currently acceptable ways to dispose of paints, brush cleaners, glues, paint thinners, varnish strippers, and wood preservatives. If you have questions about disposal of home improvement products not described in this fact sheet, please call your local or county health department.

PLEASE NOTE: In view of rapidly changing information about the toxicity of hazardous substances, readers are cautioned to take personal responsibility for following the guidelines in this brochure. If you need additional advice, contact your county extension office or your district DNR office hazardous waste section.

Leftover Paint

Use it up, share it, or evaporate it. Lead-free paint may be used up or shared if it is not too old and has never been frozen. Before you buy new paint, try to use what you have. Leftover paint could be used as a prime coat or to paint the garden shed. If you are unable to use the paint, try to share it with a neighbor, friend or community group. Service organizations, theater groups or recreation departments may be able to use it.

Oil-based and water-based paints may be shared if:

- The paint is lead-free.
- You have more than one-third gallon.
- The paint is still in the original can.
- The can has a legible label.
- It has not been frozen (latex paint only).

Evaporating Paint

Small quantities of unusable water-based and oil-based paint may be safely disposed of by allowing the liquid to evaporate in an open place; then throw away hardened material in trash.

Paint can be dried more quickly by pouring half-inch layers into a cardboard box lined with plastic or newspaper or into a box filled with sand, vermiculite or kitty litter.

Once the liquid evaporates, the remaining chemicals are locked into the solid and won't leach into the soil. However, burning the solids releases the chemicals and may raise the level of mercury and other potentially toxic chemicals in the ash. For that reason, if your community incinerates trash, check with the waste department to see whether you need to separate organic paint solids from the trash to be burned.

Paint or any other home product containing an organic solvent should not be evaporated in urban areas experiencing summer ozone alerts due to smog conditions. You can use it, share it or wait out the ozone alert.

TO EVAPORATE:

- Move the container to a sheltered, secure outdoor area away from flames, children and pets.
- Open the lid and allow liquid to dry.
- Discard hardened material in the trash.

Latex Paint (water-based)

If your home is connected to a sewer district (in other words, you do not have a septic system or a mound system), you may be permitted to flush¹ small quantities—less than 1 gallon per day—of frozen or leftover paint. Pour it down a home drain (floor or wash tub) followed with plenty of water.

Recent state water quality regulations tighten restrictions on the quality of the water which is discharged from the sewage treatment plant. Depending on the number of people flushing paint and other products, the amount of paint you can flush may be limited. Check with your local municipal sewage treatment plant for more information on disposal of larger quantities.

If you have a septic system, do not flush paint. Instead, evaporate leftover paint. The impact of pigments and other latex paint constituents in septic systems is not fully understood.

A Word About Organic Solvents

Most of the product types listed in this brochure may contain organic solvents in their formulation. In most cases, the short-term and long-term health effects and flammability of the organic solvent in these products have caused the product to be classified as a hazardous household waste when disposed of improperly. You may recognize some of the following common solvents.

- acetone
- mineral spirits
- petroleum distillates
- toluene (toluol)
- turpentine
- xylene (xylol)

This is only a short list of the many solvents used.

Disposing of Organic Solvents

Products containing organic solvents will not dissolve in water. You can evaporate small quantities (less than a cup) of these products using the method described earlier. However, most products listed in the brochure are highly flammable, so use extreme caution during evaporation. When possible, use other disposal methods.

DISPOSING OF THE REST...

Brush Cleaners

Disposal technique depends on the main ingredient. Read the label.

Solvent-based Cleaners: Settle particles and reuse liquid as described for paint thinners. Dry out or solidify remaining sludge by evaporation and discard in trash.

Containing TSP (trisodium phosphate): Detergent. Flush¹ down toilet or wash tub drain with plenty of water.

Glues and Other Adhesives

Disposal technique depends on the main ingredient. Read the label.

Solvent-based Glues: Share or evaporate. Evaporation instructions are described in the General Information section. Because they are flammable, do not dispose of in the trash or down the drain. And, if you evaporate solvent-based glues, keep them from open flames.

Water-based Glues: Share or flush¹ down a home drain with plenty of water.

Paint Thinner, Turpentine, Mineral Spirits

Settle particles and reuse liquid.

FLAMMABLE—do not dispose of in trash or down drain.

Reuse thinners by allowing particles to settle in a closed container. Transfer the clear thinner to a safe container for reuse. For example, transfer to an old paint thinner can with a lid. *Clearly label* all storage containers. Never use a discarded food container for household chemicals. Using old coffee cans to soak paint brushes in thinner is a reasonable exception to this policy. Dry out or solidify the remaining sludge by evaporation. Wrap the solidified sludge in newspaper or plastic and dispose of it in the regular trash.

Special Paints Solidify by evaporation and save for a household hazardous waste collection program.

Lead-based paint: Paint manufactured for residential use before 1978 and paint used for farm and marine equipment today may contain lead. Look for the word “lead” on the can label. Or, if the label is missing, judge by weight against a can of water-based paint. Lead-based paint is substantially heavier. For safe disposal, evaporate the liquid using the recommendations described on page 1, wrap the solid in plastic and save for disposal in a household hazardous waste collection program.

Artist paints: Many artists’ oils and acrylics contain metals which are hazardous to health. SAVE paints that include the following pigments for a hazardous waste collection program: antimony white; barium yellow; burnt umber; cadmium yellows, oranges and reds; chrome yellow, orange and green; cobalt violet (cobalt arsenate); emerald green or Paris green; flake white, mixed white or lead white; lemon yellow; manganese blue and violet; molybdate orange; Naples yellow; Thalo blues and greens; raw umber; Scheele’s green; strontium yellow; vermilion; and zinc yellow. Paints not listed may be evaporated and thrown away.

Paint or Varnish Stripper Read label to verify main ingredient.

Containing Methylene Chloride: Share small quantities of new product with others, solidify used quantities by evaporation and dispose of solids in regular trash. If these options are not readily available save for disposal in a household hazardous waste collection program.

Containing Lye: Flush¹ down toilet or wash tub drain with plenty of water. Rinse container and pour rinse water down drain.

Varnish, Shellac, Wood Oils and Stains Share unused quantities if possible. Use evaporation only to solidify very small quantities.

For recycling or evaporation instructions, follow recommendations for leftover paint described earlier in this brochure. FLAMMABLE—do not dispose of in trash or down drain.

Wood Preservatives The main ingredient will determine how you dispose of your wood preservative. Check the label.

Metal-based (such as copper or zinc naphthenate): Use up, share or save for household hazardous waste collection program.

Human and environmental impact of these preservatives is not fully understood but the product should be treated as a pesticide, in other words, as a hazard to human and environmental health.

Pentachlorophenol (PCP or penta): Do not use. Avoid all exposure. Do not attempt to dispose. PCP presents severe human and environmental health hazards. At present there is no acceptable means of disposal. If you have some of this product, package it carefully to prevent spills and save for an EPA-sponsored PCP collection program.

Preservatives containing pentachlorophenol are contaminated with a form of dioxin. This form of dioxin is suspected of causing some cancers and birth defects. If you have this product, please call your local department of health to add your name to a disposal notification list or ask them to start such a list.

¹WHEN FLUSHING HOME CHEMICALS Chemicals will interact and sometimes produce new toxic chemicals or gases. Flush your product down a clean toilet or washtub and thoroughly rinse before adding any other chemicals such as toilet bowl cleaner or cleanser. Some chemicals which can be safely flushed into a municipal sewage treatment system should not be flushed to a home septic waste water treatment system except in small amounts. If no other disposal alternative is available, wrap product container in newspaper and plastic and dispose in landfill.

More Information

Related Publications from the University of Wisconsin-Extension

G3453, *Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home: Home and Garden Pesticides*

G3455, *Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home: Solvents and Home Cleaning Products*

G3456, *Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home: Waste Oil and Other Automotive Products*

G3026, *Chemical Hazards in the Home: Pesticides*

G3027, *Chemical Hazards in the Home: Solvents*

G3028, *Chemical Hazards in the Home: Household Cleaners and Polishes*

Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home: Product Disposal Guide, DNR WW-003 86Rev, available from the Environmental Resources Center (608-262-0020) or a DNR District Office.

Making the Switch—Alternatives to Using Toxic Chemicals in the Home, is available for \$5 from the Local Government Commission, 909 12th Street, Suite 203, Sacramento CA 95814, (916) 448-1198.

Poison Palettes — A Study of Toxic Art Supplies in Massachusetts Schools, available from MASSPIRG Education Fund/Publications, 37 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111.

DISPOSAL RECOMMENDATIONS in this brochure are based on household product content descriptions listed in the report *Toxicants in Consumer Products* by Susan Ridgely, funded by an EPA grant and published by the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle, August 1982 and on EPA household waste hazard class listings found in *A Survey of Household Hazardous Waste and Related Collection Programs*, EPA/530-SW-86-038.

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