

Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home

WASTE OIL AND OTHER AUTOMOTIVE PRODUCTS

by Elaine Andrews

GENERAL INFORMATION

Many automotive products are flammable and most contain toxic ingredients. In many areas residents are not permitted to throw away flammable material in the garbage, down home drains, or down storm water sewers. Automotive products are not appropriate for septic system disposal. If you dispose of these products improperly, they will pose a hazard to drinking water quality and living things.

This publication explains the currently acceptable ways to dispose of waste oil, antifreeze, auto body filler, batteries, brake fluid, gasoline, gear lubricants, paints, parts cleaners, waxes, and transmission fluid. If you have further questions about disposal of specific automotive products not described in this fact-sheet or about other hazardous home products, 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.

Waste Oil

Recycle.

Oil never wears out, it just gets dirty!

Automotive and small machine oils include:

- Waste crankcase oil
- Hydraulic oil (may be found in farm tractors and floor jacks; if you suspect PCB contamination in old hydraulic systems, do not recycle this oil)
- Gear lubricants
- Transmission fluid

Many components of oil are toxic to living systems. Oil poured onto the ground or down storm sewers will eventually find its way into lakes, rivers, streams or groundwater. Improperly disposed oil could contaminate our drinking water and poison or damage other living things. Don't use dirty oil to kill weeds or to oil roads!

Automotive and Machine Oils

Recycle.

Recycling is easy! After draining oil, transfer it to a container with a tightly fitting lid, such as a plastic jug or metal can. Take the oil to a collection center near your home. The centers are outdoors and usually open 24 hours a day. All insoluble machine oils listed above are acceptable for oil recycling except those contaminated with PCBs or other hazardous materials. However, some automotive products are not acceptable at oil recycling centers. Unacceptable products include: antifreeze, brake fluid, gasoline, and water soluble lubricants. More information about disposal of these products is included in this brochure in the section *Disposing of the Rest*.

Call your local or county solid waste department or a DNR District Office if you have questions about which products can be recycled.

Oil Recycling Locations

Call your county or municipal solid waste or engineering departments or a DNR District Office for information about oil recycling locations in your area. Make a note of convenient addresses here.

DISPOSING OF THE REST...

Antifreeze Flush¹ less than one gallon at a time down a home drain (toilet or washtub) if connected to municipal sewer system. Dilute.

Antifreeze is highly poisonous to people and animals. Its sweet flavor attracts children, pets, and other animals. They may taste antifreeze spilled on a driveway or other surface. *Septic system users* should flush very small quantities only—less than one quart per day. The rate of breakdown of antifreeze in a septic system is not known. For advice on disposing of larger quantities, contact your local sewer district or automobile service centers.

Auto Body Filler Mix resin and hardener in a well-ventilated area and allow to harden. Dispose of in trash.

Batteries Recycle.

Car batteries may contain strong acids that can cause severe burns. Most batteries also contain lead or other hazardous metals that are poisonous. Recycle car and small engine batteries by trading in the old battery at the store where you buy the new battery. If your automotive parts supplier does not accept old batteries, you can take them to a recycling or battery business. See “Recycling Centers” and “Batteries—Retail” in the Yellow Pages. Call these businesses to make sure they will accept your battery.

Brake Fluid Flush¹ small quantities down home drain if connected to a metropolitan sewer system. Dilute.

Brake fluid is chemically similar to antifreeze. Flush small quantities—less than one gallon at a time—down an indoor drain and dilute with water. If you have a septic system, check the antifreeze advice for appropriate disposal.

Contaminated Gasoline Let solid contaminants and water settle, then pour off gasoline carefully. Use gas gradually by mixing small quantities with clean gasoline. A ratio of 1 part contaminated to 5 parts clean should work well. Gasoline recycling is available in some communities where a solvent recycling business is located.

Gasoline is extremely flammable. Do not use gasoline as a cleaner or solvent. Instead, use a parts cleaner that has a lower flammability rating or a product with a low hazard rating such as detergent. When buying parts cleaners, look for the signal words—CAUTION, WARNING, and DANGER—to help you decide which product to buy.

Because of its flammability, do not use gasoline to kill weeds. Do not mix gasoline with waste oil. If you need to store gasoline, store it only in small amounts and in specially constructed gas cans. Do not dispose of gasoline in trash or down a drain.

Gear Lubricants Recycle. See advice for waste oil in the introduction.

Parts Cleaners, Auto Paints, Car Polishes and Share or evaporate. Use up large quantities of leftover products by sharing them with neighbors, high school/technical school auto classes, or service stations.

Wax

Parts cleaners, liquid paints, and polishes are flammable and toxic. Do not throw liquids or pastes in the trash or down a drain. If you can't use small quantities, you can safely dispose of them by evaporating small quantities.

Once the liquid evaporates from these products, 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 solvent solids from the trash to be burned.

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.

Cleaners and polishes in aerosol cans need special attention during disposal. Partially full aerosol cans may explode when hot. If you can't use or share your aerosol product, empty a mostly used aerosol container by spraying remaining contents into a box while outside and away from flames, children or pets. Be careful not to breathe the spray.

Materials in clogged aerosol sprays may still be usable. Unclog aerosol spray cans by carefully cleaning the slit at the end of the spray button stem. Replace parts and turn can upside down and spray for a few seconds.

Transmission fluid

Recycle. See advice for waste oil in introduction.

Waste oil

See detailed advice in introduction.

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*
- G3454, *Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home: Paint and Other Home Improvement Products*
- G3455, *Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home: Solvents and Home Cleaning 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 Resource 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.

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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Produced by the Department of Agricultural Journalism, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

This publication is available from your Wisconsin county Extension office or from:
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Madison, WI 53706
Phone 608-262-3346

Editors, before publicizing, contact the Agricultural Bulletin Building to determine availability.

G3456 Disposing of Hazardous Wastes from the Home—Waste Oil and Other Automotive Products