

Hazardous Household Products

Many common products used around the home contain ingredients that can pose threats to our health and the environment. This is especially true when they are improperly handled. Products such as motor oil or pesticides, if disposed of on the ground, may end up contaminating your drinking water or a nearby stream. Pouring hazardous wastes down the drain is like dropping a poisonous substance into your water supply.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency considers a substance hazardous if it is corrosive, toxic, can catch fire, or react or explode when mixed with other substances. This definition includes many items that are found in most of our homes or garages. Some items are obvious such as paint thinner, motor oil, and car batteries. Others, such as polishes, insecticides, glues, and drain cleaners are not so obvious. It doesn't take much of a hazardous substance to pollute a lot of water. For example: 1 gallon of motor oil can create an 8-acre oil slick. The quality of our water starts in and around our homes.

Problems:

- # Improper disposal or storage of hazardous household wastes can easily cause explosions or fires. Sewers have exploded and garbage trucks have burned because people have carelessly discarded hazardous wastes.
- # One automobile oil filter can pollute up to 250,000 gallons of fresh water if it is discarded into the environment.
- # Batteries contain highly corrosive acids and toxic metals.
- # Wastes such as antifreeze and many common household cleaners are poisonous to humans and animals. Others are linked to cancer, birth defects, and other serious medical problems.

Solutions:

- # Always read the label and follow the directions.
- # Substitute a nonhazardous alternative for a hazardous product.
- # Buy the smallest amount of material needed to get the job done.
- # Dispose of hazardous household products at a local hazardous waste collection center or an authorized recycling center.