

# Hazardous Household Products

## Proper Disposal, Use and Alternatives

### WHY IS HAZARDOUS HOUSEHOLD WASTE A PROBLEM?

Overexposure to household products containing toxic ingredients may weaken the immune system or cause chronic health problems. They adversely impact the most vulnerable: the very young and the very old. Discarded improperly, they can contaminate air, water and soil.

Groundwater supplies are at risk of being contaminated by household hazardous wastes disposed of in the trash, on land, or down drains. Surface waters are also at risk of being contaminated in the same way.

### WHAT ARE HAZARDOUS HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS?

Hazardous household products (HHPs) are any materials used around the home that pose a threat—actual or potential—to human health or the environment when handled, stored or disposed of carelessly or dangerously. These materials can be solid, liquid, sludge or compressed gases. They have one or more of the following characteristics:

**Corrosive:** can burn or destroy living tissue and other materials



**Toxic:** can cause injury or death when eaten, inhaled, or absorbed; can cause contamination in the environment

**Ignitable:** can easily catch fire

**Reactive:** may generate excessive heat, noxious fumes, or explosion when mixed with other substances

A HHP becomes a *hazardous waste* if you throw it away. If the hazardous product is used up or recycled it is not considered hazardous waste. Nor are empty containers, no matter what product they once contained.

### COMMON HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS

#### In the Home:

- asbestos
- asphalt
- mercury thermometers and thermostats
- paints, varnishes, shellacs, lacquers
- paint thinners and removers, turpentine
- roofing tar
- rust preventatives and removers
- solvents
- wood preservatives

#### In the Yard and Garden:

- charcoal lighter fluid
- pest strips
- pesticides
- pool chemicals
- weed killers

#### In Automobile Maintenance:

- antifreeze
- auto polishes and waxes
- batteries
- cleaners and solvents
- gasoline and kerosene
- lubricants
- motor oil

#### In Cleaning and Household Maintenance:

- air fresheners
- disinfectants
- drain openers
- furniture and metal polishes
- mothballs and moth flakes
- oven cleaners
- spot and stain removers
- toilet bowl cleaners
- tub and tile cleaners

### HOW CAN I TELL IF A PRODUCT IS HAZARDOUS?

Before you buy or use a product, read the label—carefully. And because labels are sometimes incomplete or misleading, watch out for key words that indicate hazardous ingredients: *Flammable, Corrosive, Toxic, Caustic, Warning, Danger, Caution, Contents Under Pressure, Petroleum Distillates, Keep Out Of Reach Of Children.*

Choose products that give clear instructions and explain the hazards involved in the use of the product. Carefully follow instructions and warnings. Until all manufacturers list ingredients and warnings on product labels, be wary of inadequately labeled products.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS IN MY HOME?

Above all, be careful when *storing* hazardous products and the tools used with them. Keep these products out of living areas, preferably in a locked storage area if you have children or pets. Store hazardous products in a dry location in original containers, away from heat or flames. Keep a check on containers to make sure they don't leak.

With common-sense precautions and handling, hazardous products can be

used safely in your home. They only become hazardous *waste* when you throw them away!

### WHERE CAN I SAFELY DISPOSE OF HAZARDOUS WASTES?

All Cape Cod towns offer residents free HHP collections each year. You can take part in these collections to get rid of hazardous materials.

Residents also have year-round options for recycling many hazardous materials at their town's recycling center. Recycle these items instead of saving them for the hazardous household collections, as most towns will not accept them on collection day. Usable oil and latex paints and stains may be recycled in many towns during the warm months. Latex paint is no longer considered hazardous, so unusable paint should be dried out with kitty litter and thrown away in household trash.

### BRING TO THE COLLECTIONS:

- Pesticides, Herbicides, Fungicides
- Outdated Pesticides – DDT, Chlordane, Silvex, Pentawood Preservatives
- Rodent Poisons, “No Pest” Strips, Flea Collars
- Gasoline, Brake and Power Steering Fluids
- Radiator Flush, White Wall Cleaner, Bug and Tar Remover
- Furniture Polish, Metal Polish, Moth Balls
- Drain Cleaners, Spot Removers, Solvents, Cesspool Cleaners, Acids
- Oil-based Paints and Stains, Marine Paints, Auto Paints, other Solvent-based Paints
- Solvent-based Paint Thinners and Strippers, Turpentine, Mineral Spirits, Acetone
- Solvent-based Wood Finishes, Varnish, Shellac, Wood Preservatives
- Photo and Pool Chemicals, Chemistry Sets
- Thermostats, Switches, Thermometers, Jars containing Mercury

### ALTERNATIVES TO COMMERCIALLY AVAILABLE PRODUCTS

#### If you use:

#### Try:

Air freshener	White vinegar in an open dish or open the window.
All-purpose cleaner	White vinegar undiluted for tough stains, diluted with water for regular cleaning.
Bleach	Borax
Drain cleaner	Use plunger, then pour 1/2 cup baking soda and 1/2 cup warm white vinegar down the drain. After 15 minutes, flush with boiling water to dissolve crystals.
Furniture polish	1 teaspoon lemon oil in 1 pint mineral oil
Glass cleaner	Mix 3 tablespoons white vinegar, 1/2 teaspoon liquid soap, and 2 cups water.
Oven cleaner	Sprinkle spills with baking soda, cover with wet paper towels, and let stand overnight, then wipe up and rinse. Or set a dish of ammonia in the oven overnight. Add water to the ammonia in the morning and wipe the interior.
Metal polish	Clean copper, bronze and brass with a paste of white vinegar and salt; rub metal, then rinse and dry.
Scouring cleanser	Use baking soda, salt, borax or a non-chlorine cleanser.
Toilet bowl cleaner	Pour 1/2 cup borax into bowl and let stand overnight, then scrub with brush.

### DO NOT BRING TO THE COLLECTIONS:

- Latex and Acrylic Paints, Water-based Stains and Water-based Finishes are not considered hazardous. Open cans and allow the liquid to dry, or add kitty litter to the cans to absorb the liquid. When the liquid is dry or fully absorbed, dispose of the open can in your household trash.
- Smoke Detectors – place in cardboard box, tape shut, dispose of in trash.
- Explosives, Ammunition, Fireworks or Flares – check with Police or Fire Department for disposal.

- Rechargeable Batteries
- Fluorescent Bulbs and Mercury-containing Devices
- Empty Fire Extinguishers
- Empty Propane Gas Cylinders
- Empty Cans, including dry paint and aerosol cans
- Televisions, Computer Monitors, and Electronics

### BRING TO YOUR TOWN'S RECYCLING CENTER (*ask about where to deposit – DO NOT simply throw away with regular trash!*):

- Used Oil and Oil Filters
- Spent Antifreeze (where accepted)
- Old Gasoline (where accepted)

### HOW CAN I REDUCE MY USE OF HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS?

Several methods exist to eliminate or reduce the need for hazardous household products. There are many natural or nontoxic products commercially available, and many can be made from common household products such as baking soda, salt, and white vinegar.

Homemade cleaners allow for individual control over ingredients. Not only can you avoid dangerous ingredients, but irritating dyes and perfumes also. You

should remember, however, that some alternative methods may not be completely non-toxic. Using them helps to reduce hazardous waste and contributes to the overall effort to create a healthier environment.

When buying products in the home, auto and yard categories listed on previous pages, take the time to compare labels. And don't let words like "organic," "natural" or "nontoxic" mislead you. Take note of the ingredients because some products classified as nontoxic do contain toxic ingredients. And not all natural ingredients are safe.

### Use water-based products whenever possible.

#### Use cleaners wisely:

- Use heavy-duty cleaners only for heavy-duty jobs.
- Use elbow grease instead of solvents.
- Avoid aerosols by using pump sprays or wipe-on products.
- Avoid chemical air fresheners by correcting the source of the odor.
- Use a plunger or hand snake for unclogging drains.

#### Examine your painting needs and practices:

- Use latex or water-based paints whenever possible.
- Buy only what you need and use it all up.

- Use wood preservatives only if water repellants won't do.
- Reuse solvents and thinners by letting solids settle and pouring off the clean liquid.

#### Reduce or eliminate pesticide use:

- Plant native species and maintain plant health.
- Learn about pests and plant diseases and how to target them effectively.
- Use non-chemical controls first.

#### Avoid products that contain these ingredients:

- Chlorinated compounds such as trichloroethane or methyl chloride found in solvents and paint strippers.
- Creosote or penta wood preservatives.
- Lye or sodium hydroxide found in drain and oven cleaners.
- Phenols found in disinfectants and germicides.
- Petroleum distillates found in furniture and metal polishes, pesticides, and paint thinners.
- Aerosols, because spraying causes contents to break into particles small enough to be inhaled.

Older products should be handled with care. They may contain toxic chemicals that are no longer sold. Dispose of them at your town's Hazardous Household Products Collections.

### Call for information about HHP collections/disposal:

Barnstable .....	508-420-2258
Bourne .....	508-759-0651
Brewster .....	508-896-3701 x120
Chatham .....	508-945-5165
Dennis .....	508-760-6158
Eastham .....	508-240-5900 x229
Falmouth .....	508-548-7611 x485
Harwich .....	508-430-7558
Mashpee.....	508-539-1420
Orleans .....	508-255-0050
Provincetown .....	508-487-7000 x537
Sandwich .....	508-833-8003
Truro.....	508-349-6339
Wellfleet.....	508-349-0308
Yarmouth .....	508-394-0141

#### Sources:

This information and all photos were provided by Barnstable County's Cape Cod Cooperative Extension. See [www.capecodextension.org](http://www.capecodextension.org).

