

Household Hazardous Waste

A Guide to Doing it right in Lawrence and Mercer Counties



What is Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)?

HHW is any waste generated from your home that exhibits one or more of the following characteristics:

- **Toxic.** That is harmful or fatal to wildlife and humans,
- **Ignitable.** Capable of catching fire,
- **Corrosive.** Burning/irritating to human tissue or the surface of a material,
- **Reactive.** Capable of causing toxic gas release or explosion.

Many products commonly found in your home are toxic and similar to regulated hazardous wastes produced by business and industry. There are five major categories of HHW. With some examples, they include:

- **Household Cleaners.** Oven and toilet bowl cleaners, bleach, disinfectants, etc.
- **Paint Products.** Oil-based paints, thinners/turpentine, strippers, and wood preservatives.
- **Automotive Products.** Oil, antifreeze, batteries, transmission fluid, etc.
- **Pesticide Products.** Insecticides, herbicides, rodent poisons, flea collars and shampoos.
- **Miscellaneous.** Photography chemicals, pool chemicals, glues/adhesives, and rechargeable batteries.

Why are Household Hazardous Wastes a Concern?

When used as directed and with the appropriate precautions, these products pose minimal risk to our health and well-being.

However, improper use, handling, storage, and/or disposal can result in significant environmental and human health problems, including death. Among other problems, improper management can result in poisoning, toxic fumes caused by mixing chemicals, fires or explosions, and adverse health effects from chemical exposure.

One of the worst ways to dispose of HHW is to dump it down the drain or directly into the environment. Wastewater treatments plants are not designed to process many types of hazardous materials. In addition to potential problems at the treatment plant, these materials are released directly into the environment.

Throwing these products into your trash and sent to a landfill is not an effective solution either. HHW in a landfill can still pollute the environment.

How can I become more Aware?

Be sure to read the labels of your products. Hazardous products are required to have the words *danger*, *warning*, or *caution* on their labeling. The word *danger* is used to indicate the most hazardous products with *caution* used for the least hazardous. Other key words to look for include: *poison*, *flammable*, *reactive*, *irritant*, *caustic*, *volatile*, *corrosive* and *toxic*. The labels will usually include information such as proper usage, known hazards, what to do in case of an emergency, and sometimes disposal.

How can I Reduce the Amount of Household Hazardous Waste in my Home?

These are products that make our lives easier and in many instances are necessary. Difficulties arise when these materials become a waste that needs to be disposed. The most effective solution is to reduce the amount of waste that we need to dispose of. Fortunately, there are many ways for us to reduce our waste.

- When shopping, resist the urge to buy more than you actually need. Many products seem cheaper when you buy a larger quantity, but that economy size is not so economical when you consider disposal of the leftovers.
- Use up what you buy.
- Share or give away your excess to family, friends, or community groups.
- Purchase and use less toxic alternatives. There are many commercial brands available and you can make your own from common household ingredients such as white vinegar, borax, baking soda, and mild detergent. You can find a variety of recipes online for everything from air fresheners to glass and window cleaners.
- Take it to a HHW collection event or operation.

What do I do with this Stuff?

- Take steps to reduce the amount of waste that must be dealt with by following the previously discussed measures.
- Recycle what you can. Relatively convenient recycling options exist for some materials such as motor oil and antifreeze. Websites such as www.earth911.com can provide a list of options for these specific materials.
- Take your HHW to a special collection event or directly to a permitted HHW operation.
- Drop off and curbside options exist for residents of Lawrence and Mercer counties.
- The Lawrence-Mercer Recycling/Solid Waste Department can provide you with a list of options and scheduled events as well as answer your questions.



Recycling/Solid Waste Department