

IDENTIFY HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS

We use a variety of products and chemicals every day to clean and fix our homes, maintain our vehicles and take care of our lawns. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, only a small fraction of the more than 75,000 registered chemicals have gone through complete testing for human health concerns. These days, it seems like every product comes with a warning, so you may not pay much attention to the words on the label. However, when it comes to hazardous products, reading the label is the easiest way to identify them.

Outcomes

Participants will learn what the words and symbols on product labels tell them about a product's toxicity and how to use and store them safely.

Audience

Youth (ages 12+), adults

Time

20 - 40 minutes

Concepts

- A product's label tells you many important things about a product if you know what to look for, including the product's hazard level, why the product is hazardous, and steps you should take to use the product safely.
- The words caution, warning, danger or poison on a product label indicate the level of toxicity of that product, with caution being the least hazardous and poison being the most hazardous. Choose the least hazardous product for the job.
- There are many things we can do to reduce our exposure to hazardous chemicals in our homes and ensure the products we do have are stored and used safely.
- Hazardous products require special disposal at a drop-off facility and must not be thrown in the trash or poured down the drain.

Supplies

- Common household products such as window cleaner, disinfectant wipes, all-purpose cleaner, bleach, and lawn and garden items or sample products from the Hennepin County Household Hazardous Waste Learning Trunk
- Chemicals in the Home quiz and Label Reading Activity available in the Appendix
- Handout: How to identify and reduce hazardous chemicals in your home brochure
- Handout: Hennepin County Drop-off Facilities brochure
- Handout: Green Cleaning Recipes guide



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Preparation

- Ask participants in advance to discuss or provide a list of products they use around their homes, such as in the kitchen and bathroom, on floors, woodwork and windows, or in the yard and garden.
- Gather examples or ask adult participants to bring in some of the products they regularly use. Do not have youth participants bring in items. These products could be hazardous and should only be gathered for the activity by an adult.

Procedure

- Have the participants complete the Chemicals in the Home quiz (see Appendix).
- Again, ask the participants to list household products they use in their household.
- Write the list of the household products participants use on a blackboard, whiteboard or large piece of paper.
- Have participants conduct the label reading activity:
 - Have participants divide into pairs and give each pair two examples of household, yard or garden products.
 - Give each person a copy of the How to identify and reduce hazardous chemicals in your home brochure.
 - Have each pair complete the Label Reading Activity worksheet, then share the information they found with the larger group.
 - Discuss what people can do to reduce hazardous products in their home. See the How to identify and reduce hazardous chemicals in your home brochure and the Green Cleaning Recipes guide for ideas.
- Discuss steps participants can take to safely store and use products in their home, and review disposal options.
- Discuss the concept of greenwashing with participants using information from the How to identify and reduce hazardous chemicals in your home brochure. Greenwashing is a marketing strategy in which companies use several tactics to mislead consumers into thinking their products are better for the environment than they actually are.
- Ask participants if they look for environmentally friendly certifications when buying products. Certifications include the Green Seal certification and the U.S. EPA Design for the Environment. See the Green Cleaning Recipes guide for examples.

Discussion questions

- Have you read labels on products in the past? If yes, what were you looking for? What did you find?
- In the past, did you ever consider the products you use as “harmful” or “hazardous”?
- What are some easy first steps you’ll take to reduce harmful chemicals in your home?
- What did you learn about the products you are currently using?

Additional activity ideas

Tour the Hennepin County Drop-Off Facility in Brooklyn Park

This tour highlights the importance of reducing, reusing, recycling and preventing pollution. A household hazardous waste focused tour is also available. For ages 7 through adults. Visit www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation to sign up.

Resources

- Chemicals in the Home quiz, Label Reading Activity and a Home Hazardous Products Survey (see Appendix).
- Handout: How to identify and reduce harmful chemicals in your home brochure
- Handout: Hennepin County Drop-off Facilities brochure
- Handout: Green Cleaning Recipes guide
- Household Hazardous Waste Learning Trunk. This trunk will help explain the importance of proper use, storage, disposal and safety information of household hazardous products. Check out a learning trunk at angela.ziobro@hennepin.us or visit www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation.
- Green Cleaning Learning Trunk. This trunk helps explain the simplicity, safety and effectiveness of home-made cleaners. Check out a learning trunk at angela.ziobro@hennepin.us or visit www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation.