

Toxicity and hazardous waste

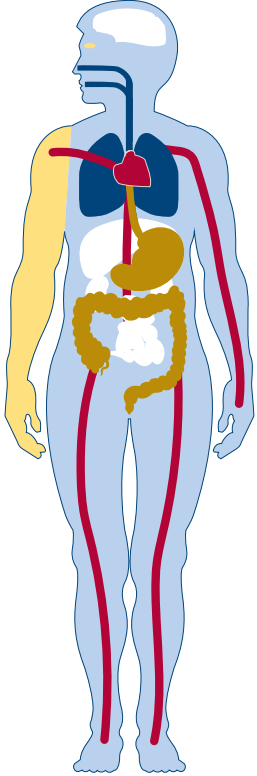


According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, only a fraction of registered chemicals have gone through complete testing for human health concerns. Some chemicals have immediate toxic effects. Others are toxic to our bodies only after repeated, long-term exposure. In addition, many products we use in our homes contain heavy metals or other hazardous materials that can pollute the environment if improperly disposed of. Because of the potential dangers associated with hazardous products in the home, it is important to know how to identify and properly use, store and dispose of them.

Exposure pathways

Chemicals can enter our bodies through a number of "exposure pathways."

Exposure pathways



Chemicals can get into your body through:

- Inhalation**
Gets into the lungs through the nose and/or mouth.
- Contact**
Gets on skin, and/or in the eyes, nose or throat.
- Ingestion**
Gets into the body through the mouth.
- Injection**
Gets into the bloodstream through a cut or puncture in the skin.

Children and pets are impacted more significantly by the negative effects of chemicals. Pound for pound, children and pets breathe more air, drink more water and eat more food than adults. When children play, they crawl and put things in their mouths. Pets can pick up harmful chemicals on their bare paws, which they can then ingest when they clean their paws. As a result, children and pets have an increased chance of exposure to potential pollutants.

What are hazardous wastes?

Hazardous wastes in our homes include unwanted chemical products that are flammable, toxic, or dangerous when combined with other products. They are also products that contain hazardous materials, including electronics, batteries and some types of light bulbs and thermometers. Hazardous wastes should be brought to a drop-off location and must not be placed in the trash.

Hazardous waste includes:

- **Automotive materials**

- Antifreeze
- Brake and transmission fluid
- Fuel and oil
- Lead acid batteries



- **Household, lawn and garden products**

- Batteries
- Cleaning products
- Drain cleaner
- Fluorescent light bulbs
- Paints, stains and thinners
- Pesticides
- Thermostats and thermometers (that contain mercury)



- **Personal care products**

- Hair spray
- Nail polish remover
- Perfume

- **Electronics**

- Cameras
- DVD players
- Computers
- Game systems
- Printers
- Telephones
- Televisions
- Radios and music players
- Speakers



- **Appliances**

- Air conditioners
- Microwaves
- Ovens
- Refrigerators
- Washers and dryers
- Water heaters



- **Tires**



Safely dispose of household hazardous waste

Improper disposal of household hazardous waste, such as throwing it in the garbage or pouring it down the drain or storm sewer, could harm your family or garbage hauler. Improper disposal contaminates our air, water and soil. We all have a responsibility to protect the environment.

Disposal options



- Dispose of hazardous waste year-round at Hennepin County's drop-off facilities in Brooklyn Park and Bloomington. Find facility information at www.hennepin.us/dropoffs.
- Bring hazardous waste to a community collection event. Find an event near you at www.hennepin.us/collectionevents.
- Some hardware stores and electronics retailers accept certain hazardous wastes, including electronics and fluorescent light bulbs.
- Find other disposal options for household hazardous waste at www.hennepin.us/greendisposalguide or call 612-348-3777.

Become a label reader



Federal law requires labeling of hazardous products by using signal words. By understanding the difference in the use of the signal words, you can determine how hazardous the product is.

Less hazardous



More hazardous

Signal Word	Hazard Level
Caution	mild/moderate hazard
Warning	moderate hazard
Danger	extremely flammable, corrosive or highly toxic
Poison	highly toxic

Hazard levels of common household products

Caution

- All-purpose cleaners
- Ammonia
- Dishwashing detergent
- Laundry detergent
- Soft scrub cleaner

Warning

- Antifreeze
- Bathroom tile cleaner
- Pine-based floor cleaners

Danger

- Chlorine bleach
- Drain cleaner
- Lighter fuel
- Metal polish
- Oven cleaner
- Rubber cement

Poison

- Ant/insect sprays
- Lye
- Mouse/rat poison

Smart purchasing and storage

Watch out for greenwashing

Greenwashing is a marketing strategy in which companies use several tactics to mislead consumers into thinking their products are better for the environment than is actually the case. Beware of these signs!

Watch out for:	Description
"Best in class"	Declaring you are slightly greener than the rest, even if the rest are highly hazardous.
Biodegradable	Products that are biodegradable are not always environmentally friendly.
False labels	Companies often make up certifications and labels for their products that required no verification. See below for validated certifications
Fluffy language	Words or terms with no clear meaning. For example: eco friendly, earth friendly, natural.
Irrelevant claims	Emphasizing one small green attribute when everything else is not green. For example: "Does not contain acid."
Suggestive pictures	Green images that indicate an unjustified green impact. For example: flowers blooming from exhaust pipes.

Sins of Greenwashing. (2010, January 1). Retrieved February 1, 2015, from <http://sinsofgreenwashing.com/findings/the-seven-sins>

Safe storage tips

- Keep products out of reach of children and animals.
- Store all hazardous products on high shelves or in locked cabinets away from food.
- Store products that say "prevent freezing" (such as latex paint) indoors.
- Never mix chemicals together (such as bleach and ammonia).
- Keep products away from heat, sparks, flames or other sources of ignition.
- Only buy the amount of product that you will use.
- Keep products in their original containers and make sure the label is legible.
- For long-term storage, place waterproof transparent tape over product labels to prevent them from falling off.

Reducing hazardous chemicals in your home

- Remove your shoes at the entrance to your home so you don't track chemicals from outside throughout your house.
- Use pump spray products instead of aerosols as aerosol mist is more easily inhaled.
- Avoid chemical air fresheners and candles.
- Avoid chemicals used in traditional dry cleaning.
- Buy fewer household hazardous products by avoiding specialty cleaners, using multipurpose cleaners and using single-ingredient products like vinegar or baking soda for cleaning.
- Use a fabric shower curtain instead of a vinyl as vinyl releases chemical gases.
- Use mercury-free thermometers such as alcohol or digital ones. Take mercury thermometers to a hazardous waste collection site.
- Dispose of hazardous products properly.
- Avoid chemical pesticides and herbicides.

Beware of toxic look-a-likes

Children and pets often do not know the difference between toxins and food. Be sure to safely store chemicals and hazardous products out of reach of children and pets. Never store household chemicals in food containers.

