

How to identify and reduce hazardous chemicals in your home



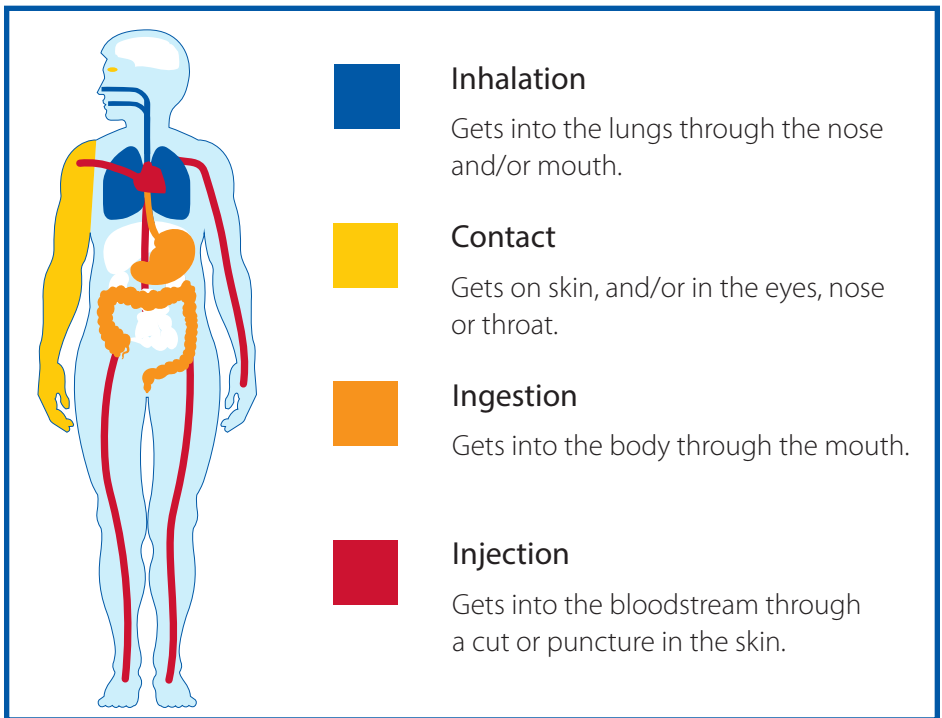
Why it's important

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. 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 one.

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.

Exposure pathways

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



Signal words

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

Become a label reader

Look for signal words on labels and choose the least hazardous product

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

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

Warning

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

Danger

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

Poison

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



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.



Characteristic words

These words and symbols are often used on labels. The accompanying symbols can be recognized and are consistent in multiple languages. Knowing the meaning of these will help to keep you and your family safe.

Image	Description
	Flammable/Combustible: The product can easily catch fire and support flame.
	Corrosive: "Corrosive," "acid," "caustic," "lye," "alkaline" or "causes burns to the skin" mean that the product can burn the skin or eyes. It can also eat away other materials that it comes into contact with.
	Toxic: "Poison" or "harmful if swallowed" mean that the product is poisonous and can be harmful or fatal if swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin.
	Reactive: "Do not mix with ____" or "store separately from other products" means the product may react violently or produce toxic gas if combined with other substances (examples: certain types of drain cleaners, oven cleaners or products containing bleach, ammonia or lye).

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 sinsofgreenwashing.com/findings/the-seven-sins

Look for environmentally friendly certifications:

- **Green Seal certification:** Products have been assessed for meeting rigorous performance, health and environmental criteria. Find a searchable list of products at: greenseal.org/FindGreenSealProductsAndServices.aspx
- **U.S. EPA Safer Choice:** Each ingredient in the product has been screened for potential human health and environmental impacts. Based on currently available information, the product contains ingredients that pose the least concern among chemicals in their class. Find a searchable list of products at: epa.gov/saferchoice/products



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.

Hennepin County offers two permanent drop-off facilities and seasonal collection events for residents to properly dispose of household hazardous wastes for no charge. The drop-off facilities, in Brooklyn Park and Bloomington, are open year-round. For more information, visit hennepin.us/dropoffs or call 612-348-3777.

Reduce 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. See our Green Cleaning Recipe Guide for recipes to make your own.
- 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.



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.



Hennepin County Drop-off Facilities

What to bring:

- Proof of residency, such as a driver's license or utility bill
- Payment, if applicable – cash, check or credit card

For the most current facility information go to hennepin.us/dropoffs or call 612-348-3777.

Open to residents of Hennepin, Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Ramsey and Washington Counties



Brooklyn Park

Brooklyn Park Transfer Station and Recycling Center

Full and self service areas

8100 Jefferson Highway
Brooklyn Park, 55445



Bloomington

South Hennepin Recycling and Problem Waste Drop-off Center

Full service only

1400 W 96th St.
Bloomington, 55431

Hennepin County
Environment and Energy
environment@hennepin.us
612-348-3777

34-509-02-18

