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Environmental
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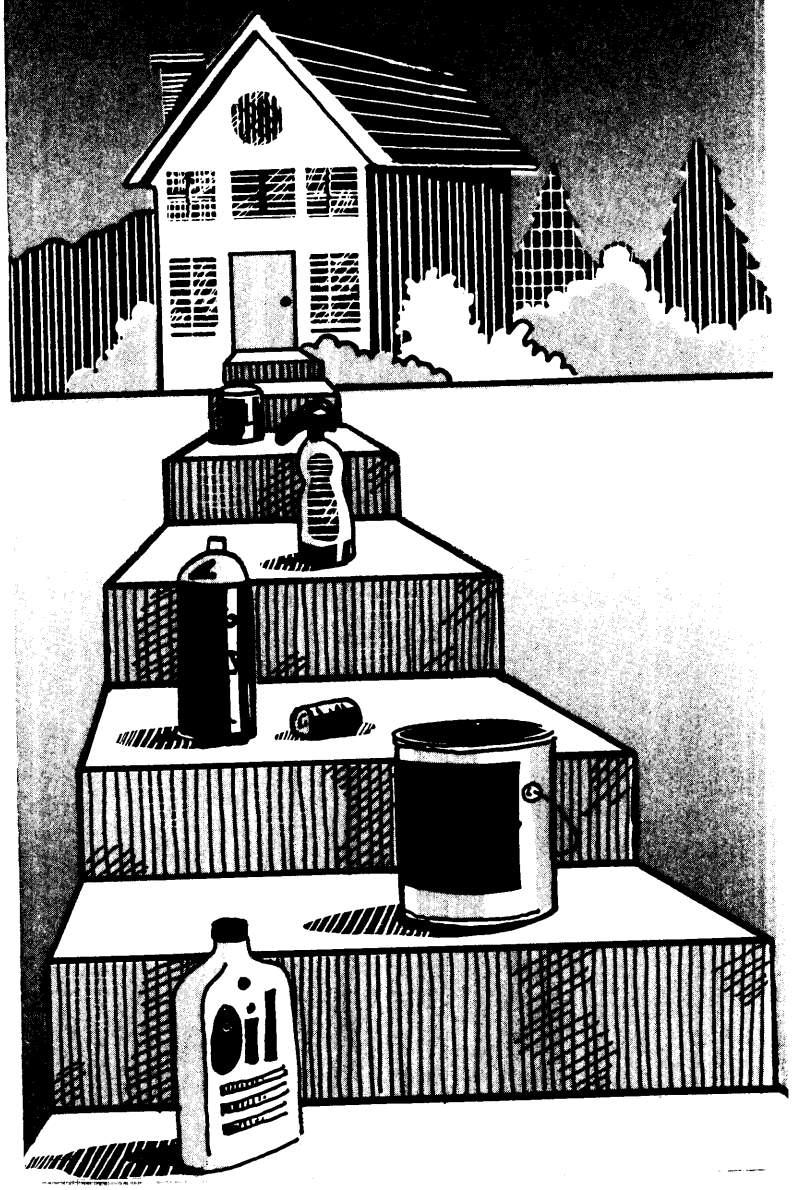
Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OS-305)

EPA

Household Hazardous Waste

Steps to Safe Management



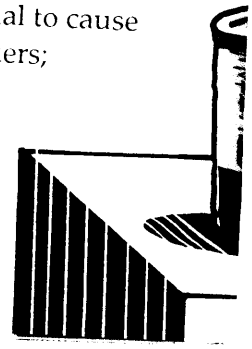
What Is Household Hazardous Waste?

Some jobs around the home may require the use of products containing hazardous components. Such products may include certain paints, cleaners, stains and varnishes, car batteries, motor oil, and pesticides. The used or leftover contents of such consumer products are known as "household hazardous waste."

Americans generate 1.6 million tons of household hazardous waste per year. The average home can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of household hazardous waste in the basement and garage and in storage closets. When improperly disposed of, household hazardous waste can create a potential risk to people and the environment. This pamphlet describes steps that people can take to reduce the amount of household hazardous waste they generate and to ensure that those wastes are safely stored, handled, and disposed of.

What Are the Dangers of Improper Disposal?

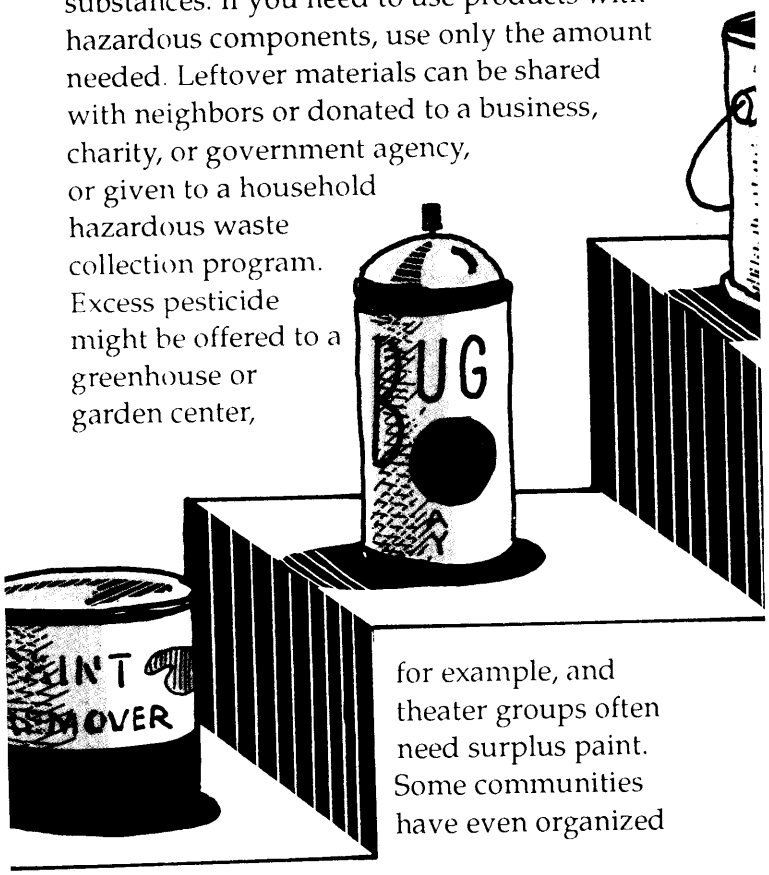
Household hazardous wastes are sometimes disposed of improperly by individuals pouring wastes down the drain, on the ground, into storm sewers, or putting them out with the trash. The dangers of such disposal methods may not be immediately obvious, but certain types of household hazardous waste have the potential to cause physical injury to sanitation workers; contaminate septic tanks or wastewater treatment systems if poured down drains or toilets; and present hazards to children and pets if left around the house.



While households do not have to separate household hazardous waste from trash under federal law, some states have special requirements. Call local or state solid waste officials to learn what requirements apply to households or small businesses in your area.

Move to Reduce and Recycle

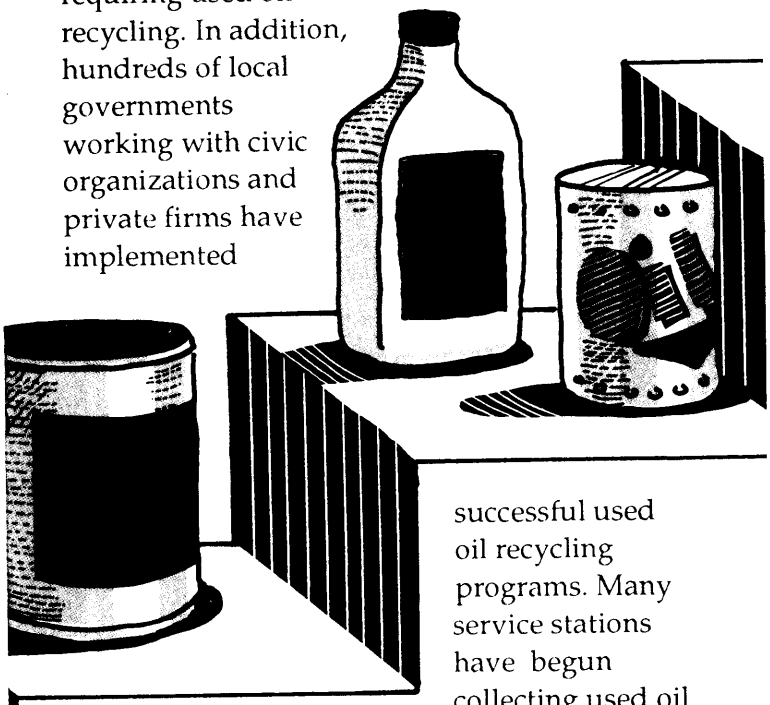
One way to reduce the potential concerns associated with household hazardous waste is to take actions that use nonhazardous or less hazardous components to accomplish the task at hand. Individuals can do this by reducing the amount and/or toxicity of the products they choose. This can include learning about the toxicity of products and about appropriate alternatives to household items containing hazardous substances. If you need to use products with hazardous components, use only the amount needed. Leftover materials can be shared with neighbors or donated to a business, charity, or government agency, or given to a household hazardous waste collection program. Excess pesticide might be offered to a greenhouse or garden center,



for example, and theater groups often need surplus paint. Some communities have even organized

waste exchanges where household hazardous waste can be swapped or given away.

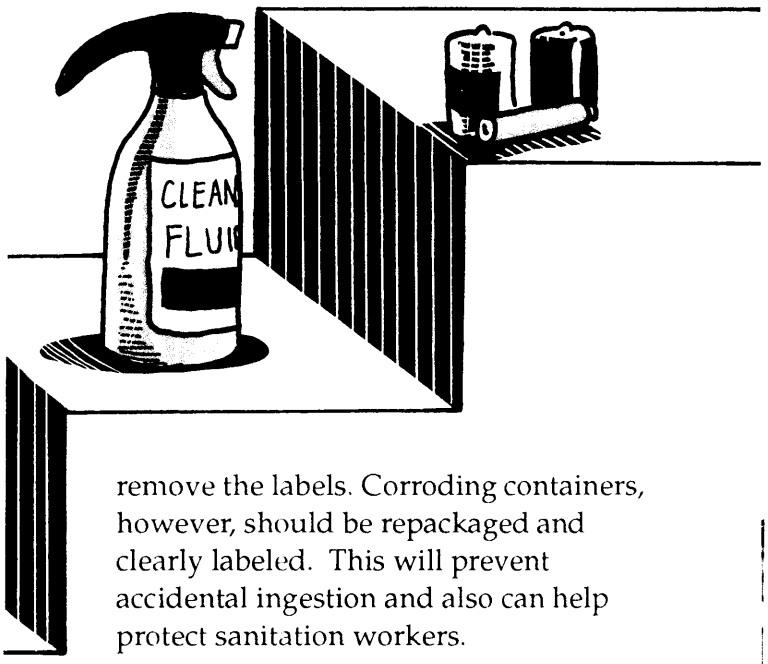
Recycling is an economical and environmentally sound way to handle some types of household hazardous waste, such as used automobile batteries and oil. Auto parts stores and service stations frequently accept used automobile batteries, and 80 percent of these batteries are currently recycled. Many states are drafting legislation requiring used oil recycling. In addition, hundreds of local governments working with civic organizations and private firms have implemented successful used oil recycling programs. Many service stations have begun collecting used oil as a service to their customers. Check with local solid waste officials to find out if a used oil recycling program is operating in your area.



Safe Management Methods

Because of the potential risks associated with household hazardous wastes, it is important that people always use, store, and dispose of materials containing hazardous substances safely:

- Use and store products containing hazardous substances carefully to prevent any accidents at home. Never store hazardous products in food containers. Keep products containing hazardous materials in their original containers and never



remove the labels. Corroding containers, however, should be repackaged and clearly labeled. This will prevent accidental ingestion and also can help protect sanitation workers.

- When leftovers remain, never mix household hazardous waste with other products. Incompatibles may react, ignite, or explode; contaminated household hazardous waste may become unrecyclable.

- Follow any instructions for disposal and use provided on the label.

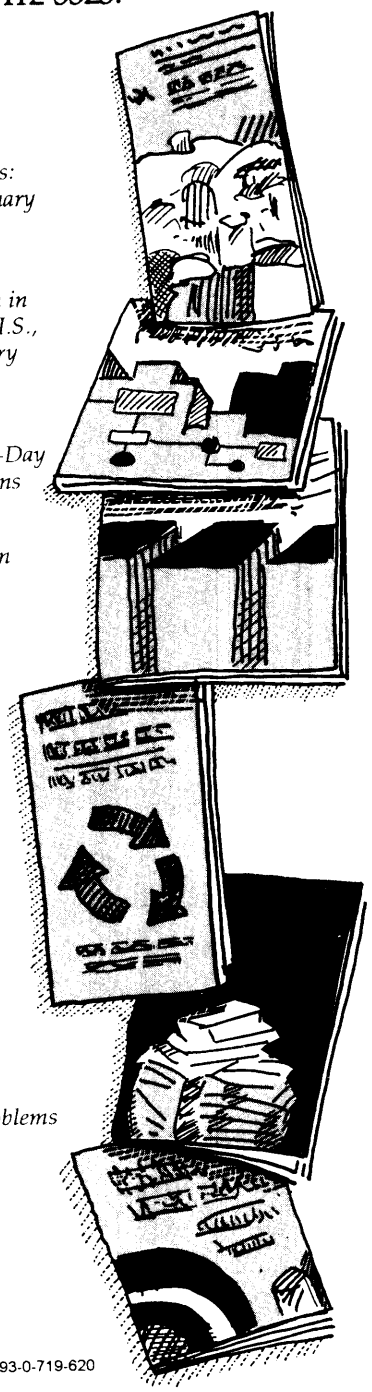
- Take household hazardous waste to a local collection program, if available.

Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days

During the 1980s, many communities started special collection days or permanent collection sites for handling household hazardous waste. On collection days, qualified professionals collect hazardous wastes at a central location to ensure safe waste disposal. Over 3,000 collection programs have been undertaken in the United States. Check with the local chamber of commerce, county, or state environmental or solid waste agency to see if there is a household hazardous waste collection program in your area.

References

The following publications are available at no charge from EPA's RCRA Hotline. Call (800) 424-9346, or for the hearing impaired, TDD (800) 553-7672. In Washington, D.C., call (703) 412-9810, or TDD (703) 412-3323.



The Consumer's Handbook for Reducing Solid Waste
EPA/530-K-92-003

Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste in the United States: 1992 Update - Executive Summary
EPA/530-S-92-019

Characterization of Products Containing Lead and Cadmium in Municipal Solid Waste in the U.S., 1970-2000 - Executive Summary
EPA/530-SW-89-015C

Household Hazardous Waste Management: A Manual for 1-Day Community Collection Programs
EPA/530-R-92-026

How to Set Up a Local Program to Recycle Used Oil
EPA/530-SW-89-039A

Recycle (Brochure)
EPA/530-F-92-003

Recycling Used Oil: For Service Stations and Other Vehicle Service Facilities
EPA/530-SW-89-039D

Recycling Used Oil: 10 Steps to Change Your Oil
EPA/530-SW-89-039C

Recycling Used Oil: What Can You Do?
EPA/530-SW-89-039B

Recycling Works! State and Local Solutions to Solid Waste Management Problems
EPA/530-SW-89-014

Used Dry Cell Batteries: Is a Collection Program Right for Your Community?
EPA/530-K-92-006

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