HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS & WASTE IN THE HOME

HOW TO STORE SMART, USE WISELY, AND DISPOSE OF SAFELY

Household hazardous products (HHPs) are everyday products that can be toxic, corrosive, ignitable, or reactive. They include some cleaners and solvents, pesticides, oil-based paint, fuels, and certain batteries. When those products are no longer wanted or usable, they become household hazardous waste (HHW). How you choose, use, and store HHPs and how you dispose of HHW directly affects your family's health, local waters, and the infrastructure we all rely on.

PEOPLE: REDUCE EXPOSURE AND INJURY

- **Exposure.** HHPs aren't "just cleaners." Many can burn skin and eyes, damage lungs, or poison people if they're swallowed or absorbed through skin. Some vapors from HHPs can cause harm indoors even in small amounts. Several are flammable or reactive, turning a routine chore into a fire or toxic-gas emergency if they're misused. Treat every HHP with the same respect you'd give any hazardous chemical: read the label, control access, and handle it deliberately.

- **Poisonings.** They happen fast. If exposure is suspected, call Poison Help 1.800.222.1222 for free, expert advice 24/7.

- **Fire risk from batteries.** Damaged or crushed lithium ion batteries can ignite in trash or trucks. Take all household lithium batteries to battery collection or HHW collection. Never dispose of them curbside.

PLACES: PROTECT STREAMS, LAKES, BAYS, AND GROUNDWATER

- **Stormwater.** Stormwater runoff travels through storm drains to rivers, lakes, and oceans. When hazardous products are dumped outside, they can move with runoff to local waters. Proper use and disposal are important to protect local waterways.

- **Groundwater.** Rain that soaks into soil can recharge aquifers and private wells. Spilling or dumping hazardous products on the ground or into infiltration features can allow chemicals to seep down and contaminate groundwater. Keep chemicals off soil.

INFRASTRUCTURE: KEEP SYSTEMS WORKING AND AFFORDABLE

- **Facility and truck fires.** Batteries and some chemical products can ignite in compactors, trucks, and materials recovery facilities, putting workers at risk and disrupting service. Do not place batteries in trash or recycling carts; use HHW or retailer drop-off sites.

- **Improperly disposed-of HHPs are hard on the system:** corrosive cleaners can eat away at pipes and seals, and solvents and fuels can damage pumps and upset treatment processes.

READ THE LABELS

Many products that you can purchase at the grocery store or hardware store are considered HHPs. It's important to read labels before you buy and understand the hazards these products pose and how to best protect yourself, your family, and your community. Here are some common HHPs:

- **Kitchen and bath.** Oven and drain cleaners (corrosive), disinfectants containing bleach or strong acids/alkalis, aerosol sprays (flammable propellants)
- **Laundry and utility spaces.** Bleach, spot removers, solvents, adhesives, fuels
- **Yard and garage.** Pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers with pesticides, gasoline, oil, antifreeze, paint, strippers

FHSA SIGNAL WORDS—CONSUMER PRODUCT LABELS

Under the Federal Hazardous Substances Act (FHSA), hazardous materials must be labeled with signal words that identify the level of hazard. Read labels for these words and take precautions based on them.

Signal word (FHSA)	Meaning	Typical hazards that trigger it	What the label must also include	Household guidance
DANGER	Highest level of hazard under FHSA for consumer products.	High toxicity or corrosiveness or extreme flammability.	Principal hazard(s); precautionary measures; first-aid, storage/handling, and manufacturer info; and "**Keep Out of Reach of Children.**" If highly toxic, the word "POISON" with skull and crossbones is also required.	Avoid if a safer alternative exists, use strict PPE and ventilation, store in locked cabinet, and treat leftovers as HHW.
WARNING	Moderate hazard.	Moderate toxicity, flammability, or irritation.	Same FHSA labeling elements, prominently and conspicuously displayed.	Use with care, follow instructions exactly, and keep away from kids and drains.
CAUTION	Lower (but still present) level of hazard.	Irritants or comparatively less-acute toxicity.	Same FHSA labeling elements, including precautionary measures and first aid.	Prefer safer alternatives when possible, use sparingly, and store properly.
POISON (with skull and crossbones) — in addition to "DANGER"	Highly toxic.	Substances meeting "highly toxic" thresholds (see 16 CFR § 1500.129).	Same elements as for "DANGER."	Do not use around children/pets, keep in original container, and dispose of via HHW.

SEEK SAFER ALTERNATIVES

For routine cleaning and tasks, there are often safer alternatives. Choose the safer option first and you reduce the expense of purchasing HHPs and have less to worry about. In addition to the options outlined below, research safe options for the cleaning or improvement project you're undertaking.

The EPA Safer Choice label screens ingredients for human health and environmental concerns and maintains a searchable list you can filter (including for fragrance-free products).

SAFER FIRST

1. **Right job, right strength.** Many everyday jobs need only soap and water. Reserve disinfectants for illness or high-touch surfaces.
2. **Choose low-VOC options**. For paints, adhesives, and other coatings, select low- or zero-VOC and certified low-emission products to reduce indoor air pollutants.
3. **Mechanical options before chemical ones.** Try a plunger, drain snake, scraper, microfiber cloth, or steam first; use chemicals only if needed.
4. **Check ingredients.** If a product claims it's "natural," verify via EPA Safer Choice or consult the Safer Chemical Ingredients List to see functional classes of safer solvents/surfactants.

BOTTOM LINE: Choosing safer products and methods prevents pollution and reduces HHW volume for your community to manage. This saves money while protecting workers and waterways.

EVERYDAY STAND-INS THAT WORK

- **Soap and water.** With elbow grease, plain liquid dish or castile soap removes most routine grime and many germs.
- **Baking soda.** Gentle abrasive and deodorizer for sinks, tubs, and stainless steel; make a paste with water or a little soap, scrub, rinse.
- **White vinegar (5%).** Dissolves scale and soap scum; great on glass. Don't use on natural stone; never mix with bleach.
- **Hydrogen peroxide (3%).** For targeted disinfection on pre-cleaned, nonporous surfaces; respect label contact time, store away from light.
- **Microfiber cloths.** Trap fine dust and cut chemical use. Use slightly damp for best pickup.

Whenever using a new product on a particular surface, test a small area to make sure the product won't cause damage.

Not every job is "natural." After illness or on high-risk surfaces, use an EPA-registered disinfectant and follow the contact-time instructions. Clean first, disinfect second.

Keep a safer kit. Remind yourself to start with safer alternatives by building a safer kit and using it first. Include liquid dish or castile soap, baking soda, white vinegar, 3% hydrogen peroxide, (optional) washing soda, two labeled spray bottles, microfiber cloths, and a non-scratch pad.

USING, STORING, AND DISPOSING OF HHPS SAFELY

BEFORE YOU OPEN IT

- **Read the whole label**. It's required to carry hazard statements; info about personal protective equipment (PPE), first-aid, and storage; and "keep out of reach of children."
- **Plan ventilation, PPE, and cleanup before starting.** Never use near flames. Keep incompatible products apart (e.g., acids and bleach).
- **Measure, don't eyeball.** Using more than directed increases exposure without improving performance.

WHILE USING IT

- **Never mix products.** Bleach + ammonia or acids can release toxic gases. Some brands of drain opener can react violently. Stick to one product at a time and ventilate.
- **Use the smallest effective amount.**
- **Store smart.** Keep products in original, labeled containers in childproof storage, and separate incompatibles. Never store in food or drink containers.
- **Don't store HHPs under your sink.** Storing HHPs under the sink puts them in the leakiest spot in the house. Moisture and sudden pipe breaks can corrode containers, smear labels, and spread chemicals fast. Under the sink is also low and reachable by kids and pets. Humidity and tight spaces can build fumes and accelerate reactions, especially with incompatible cleaners kept together, so use a high, locked, dry cabinet instead.

WHY MIXING PRODUCTS IS A BIG DEAL

Never mix cleaners or "boost" one product with another. Bleach + ammonia or acids releases toxic gases, and some drain cleaners can react violently. Follow each label's directions exactly, use only what you need, and ventilate. If exposure occurs, call Poison Help 1.800.222.1222 right away (free, 24/7).

WHEN YOU'RE DONE.

- **HHW disposal.** Set aside leftover cleaners, solvents, pesticides, auto fluids, or paint for HHW collection. Never pour into sinks or storm drains.
- **Protect pipes.** Clean tools in a way that doesn't send chemicals down drains.
- **Paint.** Many states have PaintCare drop-offs.
- **Medicines.** Use DEA-authorized take-back sites or events. If none are available, follow FDA guidance on how to dispose of the specific medicines. Flush medicines only if they're on the FDA flush list, because wastewater plants aren't designed to remove all medicines from water. For more information on how to safely dispose of medicines when a take-back site is unavailable, go to https://www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know.

IF EXPOSURE OCCURS

- **Call Poison Help** 1800.222.1222 or visit Poison Control online for free, expert advice 24/7.

KEEP KIDS SAFE AROUND HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS & WASTE

Curious hands and developing bodies are more vulnerable to fumes, splashes, and small batteries. Prevention is simple: store smart, use wisely, and dispose of safely every time.

1) STORE SMART (BEFORE AN ACCIDENT CAN HAPPEN)

- **High + locked.** Keep all hazardous products in original, labeled containers in a locked cabinet or closet, well above a child's reach.
- **Separate incompatibles.** Store bleach away from acids/ammonia, fuels away from heat, and pesticides in a dedicated bin.
- **Child-resistant ≠ childproof.** Caps slow kids down; they don't stop them. Don't rely on packaging. Rely on height and locks.
- **No food containers.** Never transfer products into cups or bottles; kids may drink them.

2) USE WISELY (DURING CHORES AND PROJECTS)

- **Kids out, air in.** Send children and pets to another room or outdoors while using strong products. Open windows and turn on fans to ventilate the space before kids return.
- **One product at a time.** Never mix cleaners. Bleach + ammonia or acids can create toxic gas.
- **Measure, don't guess.** Use the smallest effective amount and follow the label exactly.

BUTTON BATTERIES: TINY BUT EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

Coin/button batteries, especially lithium coin cells, can cause severe internal burns and death if swallowed or lodged in a child's nose or ear. Damage can begin in minutes. Keep both new and used batteries locked away and out of sight. Make sure battery compartments on remotes, key fobs, flameless candles, toys, and greeting cards are secured with a screw. If you suspect a child has swallowed or inserted a battery, act immediately. Severe damage can occur in just two hours. Call the National Battery Ingestion Hotline at 1-800-498-8666 and immediately go to the emergency room. If the battery may have been swallowed within the past 12 hours and the child is 12 months of age or older and can swallow, give 10 mL (2 tsp) of honey every 10 minutes (up to 6 doses) while traveling to the ER—do not delay care to give honey. Do not induce vomiting, and don't give anything else to eat or drink unless told to do so by a clinician. When batteries are spent, tape both sides to cover the terminals and take them to retailer collection spots or your HHW program. Never dispose of them in curbside pickup.

CHOOSING PPE FOR HHPS

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is essential when using HHPs or handling HHW. It reduces risk from splashes, fumes, dusts, and residues, especially during pouring, mixing, scrubbing, or spraying. Always start with the product label (and Safety Data Sheet if available). It tells you the required PPE, how to ventilate, and what to do in an emergency. If a task seems to need more PPE than you have, choose a safer product or stop.

1) GLOVES (CHEMICAL RESISTANT)

Use: Most cleaning, pouring, or handling of corrosives or solvents to protect skin from burns and absorption. Change if torn, sticky, or soft.

- **Nitrile** (all-purpose, good for many oils/solvents/degreasers)
- **Neoprene/PVC** (acids/bases, many cleaners)
- **Butyl** (strong solvents like ketones)

2) EYE PROTECTION (CHEMICAL-SPLASH GOGGLES)

Use: Any task with splashing, spraying, or powders to prevent eye burns and irritation; regular glasses aren't enough. Choose ANSI Z87.1 chemical-splash goggles that seal to the face.

3) FACE SHIELD (OVER GOGGLES)

Use: Decanting larger volumes or working with strong acids/bases to add face protection from splashes and drips during pouring or scrubbing.

4) RESPIRATORY PROTECTION (PICK BY HAZARD)

Use: Dusts, mists, or vapors when the label calls for it. Masks filter what your lungs would otherwise absorb. No good seal = no protection (facial hair can break the seal). If you can't get a proper fit, switch to a safer method or work outdoors with strong ventilation.

- **N95** (for dusts or particulates only; not for vapors)
- **Cartridge respirator** (add OV/AG cartridges for organic vapors or acid gases as specified on the label)

5) CLOTHING AND APRONS

Use: Corrosive or messy jobs (using toilet descalers, oven cleaners, paint strippers) to keep residues off skin and regular clothes; launder work clothing separately. Choose long sleeves and pants, closed-toe shoes, and a chemical-resistant apron for splash-prone work.

6) FOOTWEAR

Use: Garage or yard chemical tasks and spill-prone projects to protect feet from splashes and sharp debris; wipe after use. Choose closed-toe, nonabsorbent shoes or boots.

7) VENTILATION HELPERS (NOT PPE, BUT ESSENTIAL)

Use: Any strong smell or when labels require ventilation. Open windows, run exhaust fans to the outside, or work outdoors away from children and pets.

REMOVING PPE

Take PPE off in a clean area, away from the work zone, and avoid touching outside surfaces. Peel gloves off inside out, then remove goggles or face shield and apron and wash your hands. If you wore a respirator, handle straps only and avoid touching the facepiece, and wash your hands again afterward. Dispose of single-use items in the trash and set aside any heavily contaminated items per your HHW program's guidance.

STORING PPE

Clean reusable PPE (rinse goggles or face shield, wipe gloves and aprons if designed for reuse) and let everything fully dry before storing it. Keep PPE in a dry, closed container away from sunlight, heat, and chemicals; store respirators and cartridges sealed per the manufacturer to prevent passive adsorption. Inspect before each use. Replace any PPE with cracked lenses, warped facepieces, sticky or soft gloves, or expired cartridges.

OUTDOORS / PAINTING

We don’t come across HHPs just inside the house. Many are used in maintaining lawns and gardens, vehicles, and other areas outside.

LAWN AND LANDSCAPE BASICS

Using HHPs in lawns, especially pesticides, should be a last resort. Start with prevention (healthy soil, mulch, proper mowing and irrigation). Choose plants that resist local pests, and hand-pull or spot-treat small problems before they spread. If a pesticide is truly needed, identify the pest, read the entire label, and use the least-toxic product that targets that pest. Apply precisely (baits, gels, or spot sprays rather than broadcast products). This strategy is often referred to as integrated pest management.

Avoid applying pesticides before rain or on saturated or compact soils, because runoff can carry chemicals into storm drains and streams and diluted sprays won’t work well.

Keep kids and pets away during treatment. Store products in their original containers, locked and dry; never mix leftovers. Do not pour excess product or wash water into sinks, toilets, or gutters. Set aside leftovers for your HHW program or follow label instructions for any container recycling or take-back that’s allowed locally.

VEHICLES

For an at-home car wash that's less likely to pollute local creeks, work off the pavement, on lawn or gravel, so water soaks in and doesn’t run down to the gutter. Use a bucket, a shut-off nozzle, and the smallest amount of mild soap. Skip engine and degreaser work that sends oily residue everywhere. When you’re done, dump your buckets into an indoor drain (sink or toilet) tied to the sanitary sewer, and keep any suds or rinse water out of storm drains. Wipe small drips with rags, use absorbent for leaks, and wash wheels last so grime stays contained. If that’s not feasible, the cleanest option is a commercial car wash, where water is captured and treated.

When changing oil, use a drip pan, gloves, and an absorbent (kitty litter) to catch spills. Pour used oil into clean, sealed containers. Never pour used oil on the ground or into storm drains. Take those containers and the old filter to an auto-parts retailer or your local HHW program for recycling; don’t put them in trash or curbside carts.

Keep sealants, solvents, and rinse water off pavement and out of gutters. Collect and dispose of them via HHW if you can’t use them up. Remember, water in storm drains isn’t treated.

PAINTS AND COATINGS—CHOOSE AND USE SMARTER

Choose low- or zero-VOC, water-based house paints. Prep and ventilate well (fans exhausting outside). Estimate carefully to avoid leftovers. Store cans sealed and upright (label up) and use remaining paint for touch-ups. Never rinse solvents or paint into sinks or storm drains. Take oil-based paint, solvents, and thinners to HHW/paint drop-off points, and follow local rules for disposing of small amounts of latex paint if permitted. If you must remove old coatings, choose methylene chloride–free strippers or mechanical methods and wear the right PPE.

If your home was built before 1978, assume that painted surfaces may contain lead and follow lead-safe work practices. Set up containment with plastic sheeting, close vents, and keep children and pregnant people away from the work zone. Use wet methods and hand tools or sanders connected to a HEPA vacuum. Never dry-sand, dry-scrape, or use open-flame torches that create toxic dust and fumes. Clean thoroughly with a HEPA vac and wet-wipe from high to low, then re-vacuum; bag debris and paint chips in sturdy, sealed bags for proper disposal per local rules. Always wash your hands, change your clothes, and launder work items separately after the job. For larger jobs, hire an EPA-certified renovation, repair, and painting contractor.

RESOURCES

Visit these sites for additional information:

EPA — HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE (HHW)
www.epa.gov/hw/household-hazardous-waste-hhw

EPA — SAFER CHOICE PRODUCT FINDER
www.epa.gov/saferchoice/products

DEA — DRUG TAKE-BACK & AUTHORIZED COLLECTORS
www.dea.gov/takebackday

CDC — CLEANING & DISINFECTION SAFETY (CHEMICAL SAFETY)
www.cdc.gov/handwashing/cleaning-and-disinfecting-your-home.html

CPSC — FHSA CAUTIONARY LABELING
www.cpsc.gov/FAQ/FHSA-Cautionary-Labeling