

Pollution Prevention At The Home

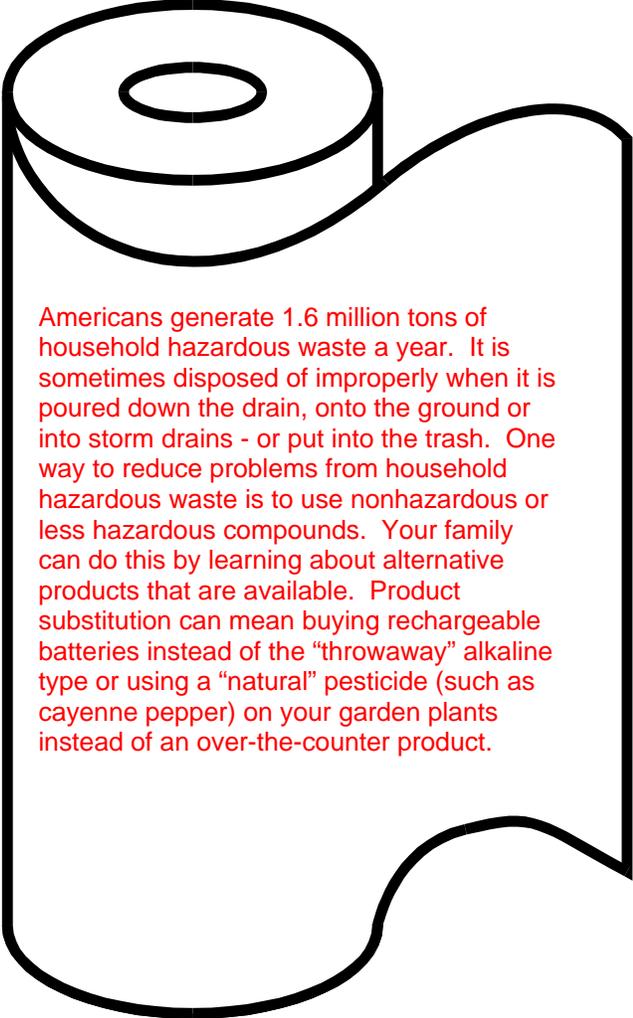
Household Hazardous Waste

Many products used in our homes contain chemicals that can be harmful to human health if used improperly. These products may contribute to contamination of the air in our homes and surface and groundwater after disposal. It is important that we are informed about these products, their proper usage and disposal and sources of less harmful alternatives.



Improper disposal of household hazardous wastes can cause problems for the entire community. Wastes can be explosive or highly flammable. Sewers have exploded and garbage trucks have burned because people have carelessly discarded flammable or reactive wastes. Household hazardous wastes include things such as bug sprays, furniture polish, metal polish with solvent, fertilizer, artist's paints, paint thinner, shoe polish, chlorine bleach, disinfectants, nail polish remover, fluorescent bulbs, lighter fluid, drain cleaners, home permanents, oven cleaner and moth balls. Household hazardous waste is any discarded substance potentially dangerous to people, plants and animals. Some chemicals cannot be treated at the treatment plant. These can end up in lakes, streams and in the groundwater.

*Some
fast
facts*



Americans generate 1.6 million tons of household hazardous waste a year. It is sometimes disposed of improperly when it is poured down the drain, onto the ground or into storm drains - or put into the trash. One way to reduce problems from household hazardous waste is to use nonhazardous or less hazardous compounds. Your family can do this by learning about alternative products that are available. Product substitution can mean buying rechargeable batteries instead of the "throwaway" alkaline type or using a "natural" pesticide (such as cayenne pepper) on your garden plants instead of an over-the-counter product.

Action Steps

1. Work within your family to find and list all the hazardous chemical products in your home. Think about where these chemicals go when they're used or thrown away. Are some flushed down the drain or toilet? Are some carelessly dumped on the ground, down a storm sewer, or into a nearby stream? Do some end up in the landfill? If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," then you could be polluting your community's water supply. Members of the



The best way to control a household hazardous waste problem is to reduce the amount of wastes your family produces, recycle all the products that you can, and participate in product substitution. If you do use a potentially hazardous product, dispose of it properly. Home hazardous waste guides contain useful information on safer substitutes and proper disposal practices. For additional information visit: www.govlink.org/hazwaste/house

family can now brainstorm a list of ways to cut down on the number of chemicals used in your home. Agree to dispose of chemical wastes and their containers at a hazardous-waste site. Obtain a “hazardous waste wheel” (a suggested web site: www.legacyenvd.org) and follow its directions. Discuss your family project with friends and neighbors to encourage them to turn their homes into a safer, healthier environment.

2. Search your local library for books about cleaning the “green” way. Then take a trip to the local supermarket. Bring a pen and paper to make a list of products. A suggestion would be to categorize products, such as laundry products, household cleaning products, etc. Carefully examine products from each of your categories. Determine which of the offered products are the “greenest” or smartest to buy. When you arrive home, check your list against the products that your family has purchased and use. Compare the products in your home to the list of products offered in the supermarket and then against the alternatives you’ve found for those products during your library research. Next, have each member of your family choose one or several make-it-yourself, environment-friendly cleaning products that you’ve found while researching. Each family member can then make “recipe” cards. Make a batch of each card to have on hand to use when cleaning your house, clothes, car or other areas. Use recycled plastic bottles to store your new “green” cleaning products.

3. Set up bins for reusable and recyclable items. Brainstorm with family members a system for storing hazardous wastes separately. If your community holds a “household hazardous waste disposal day”, participate, and encourage your neighbors to participate.

