

## Household products: HELPFUL AND HARMFUL Household Hazardous Wastes - HHW

Almost every home contains hazardous products - products used in cleaning, home improvements, automobile maintenance, lawn and garden care, hobbies, and a variety of other tasks. Everyday we buy, use, and throw away many products that contain small amounts of hazardous chemicals. These materials contribute to the improvement of everyday living, but they can also be damaging to the environment if they're not stored and disposed of properly. What makes them hazardous? Household hazardous wastes (HHW) are materials that, if not managed correctly, can harm people, pets and the environment. Some may corrode sewer pipes and others may kill the bacteria in your septic field.

Most household chemicals are safe to use and are environmentally friendly, when used according to the directions on the package. However, some have a harmful cumulative effect on the environment when they are over-used or incorrectly disposed of. We may not realize how many household hazardous items we use in a day such as paints, gasoline, nail polish removers, stain removers, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, tires, lead-acid batteries and lubricating oils.

During the 1980s, British Columbians began to understand that the products they used in their homes, yards and vehicles were key contributors to environmental pollution. When we discarded these commonly used products, we were contaminating our land, air and water resources. By 1990, concern about these household hazardous wastes had grown to the point where consumers and local governments looked to the province to help with this problem.

To solve some of these issues, provincial governments looked to *product stewardship* -- a management system based on producers and consumers taking life-cycle responsibility for the products we produce and use. Product stewardship programs are "second generation - cradle to cradle" environmental management programs based on the principles of industry efficiency, accountability and environmental responsibility. A combination of regulations, voluntary initiatives and industry funded programs are being used to shift the responsibility to industry, yet still involve retailers, consumers and government.



### Did you know?

**One litre of motor oil can contaminate two million litres of drinking water.**

Sources for this edition of *Envirosound*:

[www.gibsons.ca/1Gibsons/gibsonaquiferprotection.html](http://www.gibsons.ca/1Gibsons/gibsonaquiferprotection.html)

[wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/ips/](http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/ips/)

[www.atl.ec.gc.ca/udo/put.html](http://www.atl.ec.gc.ca/udo/put.html)



### What can we do as individuals?

#### Avoid hazardous household products

- Check the label for hazard warnings. The symbols used on hazardous household chemical products are shown below.

Did you know that the warning symbols are based on shape? The more corners a symbol has, the greater the risk. Read the label to find out how to use the product safely and what precautions to take.

#### Use alternatives to strong cleaners and chemicals around your home

- About half the chemicals in regional wastewater come from our homes. Make your own all-purpose cleaner: mix 50 ml vinegar, 125 ml baking soda and 4L water.

#### Watch how you dispose of medications

- A pharmacy will properly dispose of your unused medications such as prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs and vitamins.

#### Don't throw waste down the drain just because it's convenient

- Toxic household products can damage the environment and return to us through water and food.

## How does Howe Sound deal with Household Hazardous Wastes?

We use many of the same hazardous materials here at Howe Sound, as we do in our homes. Here is how we deal with our HHW:

**Used oil, oily drums and oil filters** are collected and taken away by a licensed company. The oil is processed into new hydraulic oil. Empty oil drums are reconditioned and then reused. Used oil filters are collected and the oil is reclaimed, the metal is recycled and the paper is incinerated.

**Fluorescent Lamps, dry cell and lead acid batteries** are collected and then sent to a licensed company in Aldergrove. The recycling of florescent lamps returns the aluminum end caps to smelters, the mercury to mercury distillers, and the glass to cement and asphalt manufacturers. Dry cell batteries are

broken down into their basic components and their byproducts are sold for reuse. Lead acid automotive batteries are disposed of by a licensed company.

**Paint cans and thinners** are dried and gathered by our paint shop. Dried paint cans are recycled as scrap steel. Aerosol cans are taken away by a licensed company for incineration.

Expended **antifreeze** is collected in 45 gallon drums and taken away by a licensed company. It is then recycled, repackaged industry as remanufactured antifreeze.

Our **janitorial department** uses the same cleaning products as we do in our homes, and we ensure that we store, label and use them properly.

## Make Your Home Safer

- **Keep HHWs out of reach of children**
- **Read the product labels**
- **Keep products in original containers**
- **Don't store flammable liquids or gasses in the home**
- **Store products properly, i.e. store fertilizer separately from gasoline**
- **Don't mix cleaning products together, i.e. ammonia and chlorine**

## Safety First

Of course, the biggest difference between our homes and industry is that we use these materials in greater volumes. That volume also increases the risk of a potential emergency. That's why our firefighters here at Howe Sound regularly complete Emergency Response Training that combines classroom education and practical exercises responding to various simulated emergencies. Our skilled firefighters are well trained to deal with emergencies involving hazardous materials.



## CONTACT US

We would appreciate any feedback on our newsletter so that we can give you information that is meaningful and interesting. If you have any comments, please contact one of us. Thanks!

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