

Fact Sheet

Household Chemicals



FEMA

Chemicals are found everywhere. They purify drinking water, increase crop production and simplify household chores. But chemicals also can be hazardous to humans or the environment if used or released improperly. Nearly every household uses products containing hazardous materials or chemicals. Knowing how to store and handle these products and how to react during an emergency can reduce the risk of injury.

Know Your Risk and What to Do

- Make an inventory of hazardous materials in your home. For a list of common household hazardous waste products, visit <http://www.epa.gov/msw/hhw-list.htm>.
- Once you have located a product, check the label and take the necessary steps to ensure that you are using, storing, and disposing of the material according to the manufacturer's directions.
- Store household chemicals in places where children cannot see them or gain access to them.
- Post the number of the emergency medical services and the poison control center by all telephones. In an emergency situation, you may not have time to look up critical phone numbers. The national poison control number is (800) 222-1222.
- Get additional information from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (www.fema.gov), the American Red Cross (www.redcross.org) and the Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov).

Children and Poisoning

- The most common hazardous materials emergencies in the home involve small children eating medicines.
- Keep all medicines, cosmetics, cleaning products, and other chemicals out of sight and out of reach of children.
- If your child should eat or drink a non-food substance, find the container(s) and take it to the phone.
- Call the [Poison Control Center](http://www.pcc.org) or Emergency Medical Services (EMS), or 9-1-1, if you have it in your area, or call the operator and ask where to report this information. Follow their instructions carefully.
- The first aid advice found on containers may not be appropriate; do not give anything by mouth until you have been advised by medical professionals.

Before a Household Chemical Emergency

The following are guidelines for buying and storing hazardous household chemicals safely:

- Buy only as much as you think you will use. Leftover material can be shared with neighbors or donated to a business, charity, or government agency. For example, excess pesticide could be offered to a greenhouse or garden center, and theater groups often need paint. Some communities have organized waste exchanges where household chemicals and hazardous waste can be swapped given away or disposed of.
- Keep products containing hazardous materials in their original containers and never remove the labels unless the container is corroding. Contents of corroding containers should be repackaged and clearly labeled.
- Never store hazardous products in food containers.
- Never mix household any hazardous chemicals or waste with other products. Incompatibles, such as chlorine bleach and ammonia, may react, ignite, or explode.

Take the following precautions to prevent and respond to accidents:

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the proper use of the household chemical.
- Never smoke while using household chemicals.
- Never use hair spray, cleaning solutions, paint products, or pesticides near an open flame. (E.g., pilot light, lighted candle, fireplace, wood burning stove, etc.) Although you may not be able to see or smell them, vapor particles in the air could catch fire or explode.

Take the following precautions to prevent and respond to accidents (Continued):

- Clean up any chemical spill immediately. Wear gloves and eye protection. Use rags to clean up the spill. Allow the fumes in the rags to evaporate outdoors, then dispose of the rags by wrapping them in a newspaper and placing them in a sealed plastic bag in your trash can.
- Dispose of hazardous materials correctly. Take household hazardous waste to a local collection program. Check with your city, county or state environmental or solid waste agency to learn if there is a household hazardous waste collection program in your area, and which materials can and cannot be disposed of by putting them in your trash can.
- Do not dispose of household hazardous wastes by pouring them down the drain, on the ground, or into storm sewers. Check before putting them out with the trash. Although the dangers might not be immediately obvious, improper disposal can pollute the environment and pose a threat to human health.

Learn to recognize the symptoms of toxic poisoning, which are as follows:

- Difficulty breathing.
- Irritation of the eyes, skin, throat, or respiratory tract.
- Changes in skin color.
- Headache or blurred vision.
- Dizziness.
- Clumsiness or lack of coordination.
- Cramps or diarrhea.

Be prepared to seek medical assistance:

- Post the number of the emergency medical services and the poison control center by all telephones. In an emergency situation, you may not have time to look up critical phone numbers.
- The national poison control number is (800) 222-1222.

During a Household Chemical Emergency:

If there is a danger of fire or explosion:

- Get out of the residence immediately. Do not waste time collecting items or calling the fire department when you are in danger. Call the fire department from outside once you are safely away from danger.
- Stay upwind and away from the residence to avoid breathing toxic fumes.

If someone has been exposed to a household chemical:

- Find any containers of the substance that are readily available in order to provide requested information. Call your local emergency medical services.
- Follow the emergency operator or dispatcher’s first aid instructions carefully.
- The first aid advice found on containers may not be appropriate; do not give anything by mouth until you have been advised by medical professionals.
- Discard clothing that may have been contaminated. Some chemicals may not wash out completely.

For More Information

- Household Hazardous Materials: A Guide for Citizens. IS 55. An independent study resource for parents and teachers. Web-based safety program focused on reducing the number of deaths and injuries in the home. Available online at <http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/is55.asp>.
- Chemical Emergencies. An online resource from the American Red Cross. http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0.1082.0_581_00.html
- EPA for Kids: Learn About Chemicals Around Your House. www.epa.gov/kidshometour

Dangerous Household Chemical Myth!	The Facts:
It is safe to throw household hazardous waste (HHW) in the trash.	While Federal law allows disposal of HHW in the trash, many communities have collection programs for HHW to reduce the potential harm posed by these chemicals to sanitation workers, children, pets and the environment. Call your local environmental, health, or solid waste agency for the time and location of your HHW collection program.