

Household Hazardous Waste: A Guide for Texans

What is household hazardous waste (HHW), what can you do with it, and who can accept it?

What is Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)?

Some leftover or used household products contain chemicals that can present safety concerns if not managed properly. These products are often called household hazardous waste (HHW) and can include items like:

- Corrosive cleaners (such as drain cleaner and lye-based oven cleaner)
- Fluorescent light bulbs (including CFLs)
- Fuels (gasoline, propane, diesel)
- Mercury
- Paints (oil-based or some anti-mildew latex)
- Pesticides
- Pool chlorine and acid
- Wood stains or varnishes

If generated by a household, these materials are not required to be handled as hazardous waste and can often be placed in your regular trash. However, residents often seek to dispose of their HHW in a more protective manner.

What do I do with my HHW?

Many communities in Texas either have HHW drop-off facilities or hold HHW collection events for their residents. The TCEQ maintains a list of ongoing programs and individually scheduled events posted on our [HHW Program Contacts](#) page.

To protect both yourself and the workers who accept your HHW at a collection site, follow some basic guidelines and tips for storage, transportation, and care of your material:

- Keep products in their original container and make sure labels are readable. This ensures you know which products you have and so do the workers who accept and sort your HHW.
- Store and transport your chemicals upright, not on their sides. Make sure if you are taking HHW to a facility or event, that you have secured it in your vehicle and it is not leaking – it can be dangerous if leaking containers of incompatible chemicals mix.

- **NEVER** mix products together. This can be dangerous, even deadly.
- Keep chemicals in a cool, dry place out of reach of children and pets.

Managing HHW in your Home

You can decrease the HHW in your own home by using some simple guidelines:

REDUCE the amount of HHW you keep in your house:

- Buy only what you need to do the job. Buying chemicals in bulk may not be saving you money if you do not use all of them.
- Consider using alternative household products that do not contain hazardous materials.
- For painting projects, know the size of your area and use an online paint calculator to determine how many gallons you should buy.

Think **REUSE**:

- Pass on your unexpired chemicals or paint in good condition to friends, relatives, or neighbors who can use them! Doing this will save time and money for yourself and others.

What can I do with...?

Antifreeze:

Antifreeze is nonhazardous, however many programs that collect HHW and/or used oil will also accept antifreeze. Some automotive shops also take used antifreeze for recycling.

Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs (CFLs):

Like other fluorescent light bulbs, CFLs (including green tip) contain some amount of mercury, though it is a small amount and not released when the bulb is intact or in use. If you have a CFL that breaks, the EPA offers information on [cleaning up the broken bulb](#)  .

Recycling is the best option for CFLs. Check to see if an **HHW program** in your area accepts CFLs or check www.lamprecycle.org

Businesses looking to properly dispose of fluorescent lamps can find out more from the TCEQ guide about [complying with laws when disposing of lamps and other equipment containing mercury](#).

Consider energy efficient LED bulbs to replace CFLs when appropriate.

Empty bottles (cleaners):

Empty plastic containers that held cleaners or chemicals can be recycled as other similar plastics. Before recycling, first triple rinse your empty container.

Mercury:

Mercury-containing household products are often accepted by household hazardous waste collection programs.

The following is a list of household products that contain, or may contain, mercury. Also listed are alternative recycling options for these products.

Mercury-Containing Product	Alternative Recycling Options
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Button Cell Batteries	Certain battery retailers and mail-in recycling programs accept button-cell batteries for recycling.
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Mercury Thermometers	
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Thermostats	Mail-in options and drop-off locations for used mercury thermostats can be found on the Thermostat Recycling Corporation website [↗] . Other organizations also offer mail-in recycling services for mercury thermostats.
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Fluorescent lamps and bulbs (CFLs)	Certain lamp and bulb retailers [↗] and mail-in programs accept fluorescent bulbs and lamps for recycling.
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High-intensity discharge (HID) lamps and bulbs	Certain mail-in programs accept HID bulbs and lamps for recycling.
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Dental Fillings	Your dentist may be able to help you recycle used dental fillings [↗] .
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Switches & Relays

The Environmental Protection Agency has provided guidance on [what to do if you have mercury in your home](#).

Paint (partially full or usable):

If stored properly, partially used paint can last for years! Consider using leftover paint on future projects or for touchup later on. Increase the life of your leftover paint by doing the following:

1. Cover the opening with plastic wrap.
2. Put the lid over the plastic wrap and make sure it is on securely.
3. Turn the can upside down. The paint creates a seal around the secure lid, keeping it fresh until you need it again.

Paint (empty or mostly empty):

If your can is less than 1/4 full, remove the lid and place the can in a well-ventilated area. The paint will dry in a few days. Once dry, the can may be thrown in your trash.

Smoke detectors:

Certain smoke detectors contain very small amounts of radioactive material. Some smoke detector manufacturers have take-back programs for used smoke detectors containing radioactive material. Local governments also sometimes have programs in place to take back smoke detectors. The [United States Postal Service website](#) contains helpful guidance on smoke detector disposal.

Syringes:

Please see our publication [Disposing of Syringes from Households: Do's and Don'ts \(GI-418\)](#) for information on safe disposal of the needles after use.

Used Oil and Oil Filters:

You can take your used oil and filters to used oil collection centers. In addition, while used oil cannot go in the landfill, it is accepted by many HHW collection programs. For a quick view of used oil and used oil filter management, see [Used Oil and Used Oil Filters in Texas](#).