

Managing Household Hazardous Waste Yourself

The processes described below involve either solidifying wastes for disposal via regular garbage service or using evaporation to "dispose" of the material. When using either method, be sure to work outside and wear rubber gloves and eye protection. Also, never mix more than one material when you're preparing the items for disposal.

Solidification- The idea here is to make the liquids solid so they may be disposed of with your regular household garbage. Sawdust or shredded newspaper will work, but for larger quantities, you'll want to get cat litter, cheaper at auto parts stores; ask for oil dry. Double-line a garbage can with plastic garbage bags, add some of the oil dry and then some of the liquid waste. (Don't add oil dry to the liquid, as it may splash.) Work outside, away from access by children or animals. When the material has solidified, tie up the bag and place it in with your regular trash. Be sure the bag will not be so heavy that you can't handle it, or that it ruptures. Wear gloves and safety glasses to prevent contact with the materials you're handling.

Evaporation- This method works best for thin, flammable liquids, including gasoline and paint thinner. Again, work outside, away from access by children and animals. If there is only a trace amount of liquid in the container, simply open the top and let it evaporate. For any larger amounts, you'll want to accelerate the process. Use a disposable metal tray (an aluminum foil roasting pan is ideal) and pour a half-inch of liquid into the tray. The larger surface area will allow the liquid to evaporate much more quickly. Repeat this process until the liquid is gone and then recycle or reuse the containers, if possible.

The foil tray can be recycled with scrap aluminum in some collection programs. If you're leery of having the fuel-coated foil around your house until you can recycle it, then crush the tray, wrap it in a few layers of newspaper and put it in a sturdy plastic garbage bag. Then it can be disposed of with your regular household garbage.

Tips for avoiding this problem in the future include (1) trying to determine how much material (paint, insecticide, etc.) the job will actually require and not purchasing more than you'll need and (2) exploring less-toxic alternatives.

Please note that EPD neither endorses, nor recommends, the services of any specific company.