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 Waste Has Its Place

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All Waste Has Its Place

Urban and rural Texans have three different disposal options when looking to discard used products containing hazardous waste.

Even products with hazardous contents can be disposed of properly

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Households generate a lot of garbage each year. But not every discard is a candidate for the local landfill.

Many home and garden products fall into the category of toxic or hazardous substances. Products such as paint, motor oil, antifreeze, gasoline, bug spray, and fertilizer should be handled and stored with care. Without proper disposal, the unused contents could contaminate the environment and even endanger the user's health.

Consumers need to remember that some products kept in the home or garage can be flammable, poisonous, explosive, or carcinogenic. These items should never be thrown in the trash, washed down the drain, or poured on the ground.



This technician wears a respirator and safety suit while pouring paint thinner into a container. Workers dealing with hazardous materials must be careful they do not inhale fumes or absorb chemicals through the skin.

Various collection and disposal events offer urban and rural Texans a chance, at least once a year, to safely dispose of waste products not recommended for municipal landfills. These organized collections, many of which are sponsored by the TCEQ, ensure that hazardous materials stay out of surface waters, groundwater supplies, and wastewater treatment plants. They also discourage illegal dumping.

The following collection programs are held around the state. For some, locations change from year to year.

Household hazardous waste collections. These events, usually held in urban areas, are sponsored by local government or industry to receive paints, pesticides, waste oils, cleaners, solvents, batteries, etc. Fourteen cities have permanent drop-off centers; 70 more cities hold annual one-day collections. In 2003, the permanent centers saw more than 64,000 participants bring in 1,806 tons of hazardous waste; the 149 one-day events had 33,900 participants deliver 1,244 tons.

Texas Country Cleanups. Because rural Texans typically do not have the recycling opportunities found in cities, country cleanups allow them to turn in empty pesticide containers, used oil, used oil filters, and lead-acid batteries. In 2003, 20 such events drew about 1,230 participants who delivered 15,960 containers, 1,800 gallons of used oil, 35,460 used oil filters, and 1,940 batteries.

Agricultural waste pesticide collections. These one-day events give farmers and ranchers the opportunity to dispose of agricultural chemicals in a manner that is safe and environmentally sound. Left sitting around a homesite, these products could pose a hazard to the home owner's family and eventually the surrounding community. Texans

Discarded Items Accepted at Most Collection Events

- Agricultural chemicals, including pesticides and fertilizers.
- Household chemicals, such as pesticides and herbicides, paints and thinners, antifreeze, household batteries, aerosol cans, mercury thermometers, gasoline and other automotive products, cleaners, pool chemicals, and fluorescent bulbs.
- Other items, such as properly cleaned plastic pesticide containers, used motor oil and oil filters, and lead acid batteries.

Note: Empty plastic pesticide containers must be triple-rinsed or high-pressure rinsed. Motor oil filters are limited to two 55-gallon drums per participant. Oil and filters will not be accepted from businesses that change oil for a fee.

Items Not Accepted

- Tires, radioactive materials, explosives, compressed gas cylinders, herbicides containing 2, 4, 5-TP (Silvex), biomedical wastes, ammunition, fertilizers, and pesticide or wood preservatives with pentachlorophenol (unless quantities are less than 5 gallons).

have been known to travel several hundred miles to attend waste collections held at county fairgrounds, stadiums, and cotton gins. A total of 150 tons of pesticides was received at the 12 collections held last year. Cosponsors with the TCEQ are the Texas Cooperative Extension, the Texas Department of Agriculture, and several river authorities.

Once collected, these waste products are handled by a licensed hazardous waste management firm. Pesticides, for example, are usually shipped to a hazardous waste incinerator, and the tripled-rinsed containers go to a recycler. Motor oil is reprocessed, and paint is rebled for reuse or treated to be made less hazardous.

The TCEQ's events are financed from fees paid by hazardous waste generators. For locally sponsored collections, funding sources include local governments, chemical manufacturers, hazardous waste disposal companies, civic groups, and businesses. Grants from councils of governments are available, as well.

To learn where to take various items for recycling or proper disposal, call the [Texas Environmental Information Line](#) at 1-800-CLEANUP.

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Broad Strokes

The leading waste product collected at household hazardous waste collections is paint. Disposal centers across Texas collected more than 1,500 tons of used paint last year.

Consumers are wise to bring unused paint to these collection centers for safe disposal, but many do not realize how easily paint can be reused. A number of organizations and charities are eager to accept unused paint. Church and civic groups, city parks and recreation departments, and graffiti-removal groups typically accept donations of usable paint.

Neither oil-based nor enamel-based paints should be placed in a landfill because of possible groundwater contamination. However, cans of completely dried latex paint may be included with routine garbage.

To reduce the amount of paint purchased, the TCEQ can provide [help in estimating](#) the volume required.

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Hazardous products typically found in the home or garage are about to be sealed in a steel drum and disposed of properly. Items such as automotive oil and solvents have to be handled carefully and should never be tossed out with the regular garbage.

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