

TOXIC • USE ONLY AS
WARNING • CAUTION • DANGER • FLAMMABLE
CORROSIVE • POISONOUS • OUT OF REACH OF



**SAFEGUARD
YOUR HOME
FROM HARMFUL
PRODUCTS**

WORKING TOGETHER: SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES AND SOLUTIONS

It is important for *all of us* to consider the potential health, safety, and environmental impacts of the products we buy. Consumers, as well as government, can hold industry accountable for the products they provide.

The best way to eliminate possible hazards is simply to avoid buying potentially harmful products—those that contain poisonous, flammable, or corrosive chemicals—and replace them with safer, alternative products. “Vote” with your purchasing dollars and, by writing or calling product manufacturers, voice your concerns and state your demands for industry to provide consumers with products that are safe, as well as effective. Ask your supermarket to stock non-toxic cleaners and pesticides, in addition to the common brands that line grocery shelves.

If you do buy a potentially harmful product, buy only as much as you really need and use all of it before safely discarding the container. Your efforts to reduce product waste will help control rising consumer and waste disposal costs.*

Government and environmental advocacy groups are working together to compel industry to eliminate hazardous materials from their products. Recent examples include the removal of mercury from most household batteries and the reduction of hazardous heavy metals, such as lead and cadmium, from packaging used for products sold in New York State.

The New York City Departments of Sanitation and Health urge residents to take an active role in preventing the use and improper disposal of harmful products. By following Department of Sanitation guidelines, purchasing wisely, and handling products carefully, you *will* make a difference.

* Companies charge higher prices to consumers as a result of government regulatory fees that require industry to accept financial responsibility for the environmental, public health, administrative, and waste management costs associated with the production, distribution, sale, and disposal of their products. And, of course, the City uses your tax dollars to collect and properly dispose of your waste.

INTRODUCTION

You may be surprised to learn that most common household products are potentially harmful. Even too much of a “safe” and “natural” product can be unhealthy. When choosing products, consumers should take the time to read labels and follow instructions carefully. It is important to consider the potential effects of the products you bring into your home every day.

Read this brochure to learn how to protect the health and safety of your family and the environment by avoiding potentially harmful products whenever possible and identifying, using, storing, recycling, and discarding them properly.

A CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO POTENTIALLY HARMFUL PRODUCTS

IDENTIFY

To identify products that may be hazardous to your health or the environment:

- ▶ **Read warning labels.** Before purchasing a product, read the warning label to look for the following “signal words” that indicate potential hazards:

DANGER

FLAMMABLE

CORROSIVE

WARNING

POISONOUS

USE ONLY AS DIRECTED

CAUTION

TOXIC

KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN

- ▶ **Read directions.** Product labels may recommend precautions such as only using the product in a ventilated area, wearing protective clothing, storing away from heat or flames, etc. These types of warnings indicate that the product is potentially harmful and should be used and stored with caution.

AVOID EXPOSURE

The best way to avoid exposure to a product is not to buy it. However, if the product is necessary, consider the following recommendations:

- ▶ **Try not to use products too much or too often.** For example, minimize the use of heavy-duty cleaning products and household insecticides by cleaning more often with milder products and by keeping counters, tabletops, and floors clear of food that may attract pests.
- ▶ **Do not buy more of a product than you need to use right away.** Buying the economy size may save a few pennies today, but can leave you with a hazardous product to either store or discard. Talk to friends and neighbors about borrowing and lending infrequently used products.
- ▶ **Always follow product safety instructions.** Read label instructions carefully. If you have any questions, look for the manufacturer's toll-free number or website to obtain more information.
- ▶ **Remember to ventilate.** Try to use products in well-ventilated areas to avoid inhaling fumes. If possible, work outside.
- ▶ **Install smoke detectors.** Place smoke detectors in areas where you frequently use or store hazardous products.
- ▶ **Pregnant women, beware.** If you are pregnant, avoid exposure to all potentially harmful products.

USE SAFELY

- ▶ **Consider using personal protection equipment.** Use appropriate safety equipment, such as a mask, goggles, and chemically resistant gloves (some chemicals can penetrate latex gloves).
- ▶ **Do not mix products together.** NEVER MIX AMMONIA AND CHLORINE BLEACH.
- ▶ **Invest in a fire extinguisher.** Buy a multi-purpose, dry chemical fire extinguisher and keep it within reach.

STORE CAREFULLY

- ▶ **Store products in original containers.** If you cannot do so, label them clearly. Never store potentially harmful products in food or beverage containers.
- ▶ **Keep flammable products away from heat, flame, fire, or ignition sources.** In addition to ovens, stoves, fireplaces, and heating units, keep products away from sources of sparks, such as gas pilot lights, lit cigarettes, light switches, and garage door openers.
- ▶ **Keep products out of reach of children and pets.**

DISCARD PROPERLY

Undoubtedly, there are situations that require using certain products or discarding harmful wastes. For example, you may already have old or forgotten paints, solvents, pesticides, and hobby chemicals stored in your garage, closets, or under your sink. Or you may discover chemical products others left behind when you move into a new home. In these or other circumstances, follow these recommendations:

- ▶ **Try to donate unwanted, usable materials.** Consider donating potentially usable items—such as paint—to friends or community organizations.
- ▶ **Use as much of a product as possible.** For example, before discarding used paint thinners, paint brush cleaners, or solvents, let them sit in a closed container for a few days until paint residue and other solid matter settles to the bottom. Pour off the clean liquid into a new container, seal and label it for future use, and then discard only the residue.
- ▶ **Discard products safely.** You can legally discard most items in the trash. To protect children, pets—and Sanitation workers—wrap items carefully. You can use kitty litter, newspaper, or other absorbent material to soak up any liquid waste to keep it from leaking. Place sharp objects like hypodermic needles and lancets in a sealed metal container, such as a coffee can with masking tape around the lid, and label the container “used syringes” or “sharps”.

- ▶ **Return automotive batteries and motor oil; it is *illegal* to place them in the trash.** Return used auto batteries to any retailer that sells them; they are required to accept up to two per month per person for free. (Returning an auto battery when buying a new one saves the \$5 surcharge.) Bring used motor oil to service stations that change oil or to large retailers that sell oil. They are required to accept up to five gallons per day per person at no charge.*
- ▶ **Return button batteries.** Ask jewelry stores, watch repair shops, camera stores, and other retailers to recycle your button batteries. Though not required to, many will.
- ▶ **Recycle Special Wastes.** The Department of Sanitation allows NYC residents to bring “special wastes”—motor oil, oil filters, transmission fluid, auto batteries, household batteries, latex paint, fluorescent tubes, thermostats—to any of five drop-off centers open every day. For site locations and additional information contact the Sanitation Action Center (212-219-8090), or visit the Sanitation website at www.nyc.gov/sanitation.
- ▶ **Recycle rechargeable batteries.** The Charge Up to Recycle Program of the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation provides a list of NYC retailers that accept rechargeable batteries for recycling. For information and list of retailers, call 1-800-8-BATTERY or visit www.rbrc.com.
- ▶ **Participate in NYC’s mandatory Residential Recycling Program.** Recycling is the law in New York City. Do not place recyclables in the trash; it is illegal and you will be fined. For information about recycling, call the Sanitation Action Center (212-219-8090), or visit the Sanitation website at www.nyc.gov/sanitation.

* The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation is responsible for enforcing laws pertaining to batteries and motor oil. If you have problems returning these items, call (718) 482-4885.

CONSIDER USING ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTS

- ▶ **Substitute non-toxic cleansers and pesticides.** Check health food stores, food co-ops, mail-order catalogs, and even supermarkets for non-toxic cleaning products and pesticides. Citrus-based cleaning products are generally effective and may be even safer than other alternative cleansers. Try to avoid products that contain phosphates, chemical bleaches, petroleum detergents, and synthetic perfumes. (See [Resources](#) for more information.)

You can also make your own safe substitutes. These common solutions, plus some elbow grease, are reliable and effective ways to get the job done:

- **Ceramic tile cleaner:** Mix one-quarter cup white vinegar with one gallon of water.
- **Furniture polish:** Mix three parts olive oil with one part vinegar. Wipe with a clean, soft cloth.
- **Oven cleaner:** Sprinkle vinegar, then a layer of baking soda, on oven surfaces. Rub gently with very fine steel wool for tough spots; wipe with a sponge.
- **Toilet cleaner:** Sprinkle baking soda into the bowl, drizzle with vinegar, and scour with a toilet brush.
- **Roach control:** Kill roaches with a mixture of equal parts flour, oatmeal, and plaster of Paris. Keep out of reach of children and pets.
- **Ant control:** Wash countertops, cabinets, and floors with equal parts vinegar and water.
- **Mothballs:** Use cedar blocks or chips instead.
- ▶ **Buy mercury-free batteries.** Check packages of alkaline batteries (i.e., those used in radios and flashlights) to see whether or not they are mercury-free. Also, if you use a hearing aid, consider using zinc-air batteries instead of mercuric-oxide batteries, when feasible.
- ▶ **Try rechargeable alkaline batteries.** Using rechargeable batteries that can be used many times before disposal helps reduce the amounts of cadmium, mercury, and lead (contained in household batteries) entering the waste stream. Be sure to choose rechargeable alkaline batteries instead of rechargeable nickel-cadmium batteries. Cadmium is a heavy metal that can pose environmental and health hazards when mined, processed, or discarded.

- ▶ **Use latex (water-based) paint, instead of oil (solvent-based) paint.** Oil paint is flammable and contains volatile organic compounds that can cause air pollution and contribute to smog.
- ▶ **Use water-based correction fluid and typewriter correction tape instead of solvent-based correction fluids.** Solvent-based correction fluids may contain toxic chemicals, such as 1,1,1-Trichloroethane, which is a suspected carcinogen. They are also flammable and contain volatile organic compounds that can cause air pollution.

LAWN AND GARDEN CARE

You can eliminate the use of fertilizers, weed killers, and pesticides and still have healthy and attractive lawns and gardens. To find out more information on the topics below, visit the Department of Sanitation Compost Project website at www.nyccompost.org.

- ▶ **Leave it on the lawn!** When you mow your grass, leave clippings on the lawn instead of raking and bagging them. The clippings decompose and provide nitrogen to the soil, so you can reduce, or even eliminate, fertilizing.
- ▶ **Compost yard and food waste.** Grass clippings, yard trimmings, autumn leaves, and kitchen scraps can all be composted. Using rich, soil-conditioning compost on lawns and gardens keeps plants healthy naturally, eliminating the need for fertilizers and pesticides.
- ▶ **Choose appropriate plants.** There are many attractive varieties of shrubs and flowers that are resistant to disease and pests. You can also plant grass blends that need less frequent mowing and require less water and fertilizer.
- ▶ **Use alternative products.** Many garden centers and catalogs now sell fertilizers, pesticides, and weed controls that are organic or made with safer ingredients.

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS

- ▶ **Post emergency phone numbers.** Post a list of emergency phone numbers (fire, medical assistance, poison control center) by your phone and teach children when and how to use them.
- ▶ **In case of poisoning.** If you think a family member (or pet!) has been exposed to a harmful product, call the NYC Poison Control Center Hotline at **212-POISONS (212-764-7667), 212-VENENOS (212-836-3667), or 212-340-4494.**

RESOURCES

These are not complete lists and mention in this brochure does not constitute endorsement.

PUBLICATIONS

Guide to Hazardous Products Around the Home, available from the Household Hazardous Waste Project, University of Missouri Extension, 1031 East Battlefield, Suite 224-B, Springfield, MO 65807, (417) 889-5000, <http://outreach.missouri.edu/owm/hhw>. [\$9.95]

Household Hazardous Waste – Reduce Your Use, available from the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, Bureau of Waste Reduction and Recycling, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-7523, (518) 402-8704, www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dshm/redrecy/hhw.htm [free]

MAIL ORDER COMPANIES

These companies sell healthy home and garden products.

Gardens Alive!

5100 Schenley Place
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
(812) 537-8650
www.gardensalive.com

Seventh Generation

212 Battery Street, Suite A
Burlington, VT 05401-5281
(802) 658-3773
www.seventhgen.com

ORGANIZATIONS

The organizations listed below provide information on grass mulching, composting, integrated pest management, and alternative lawn and garden care. For links to these and other compost-related websites, visit the resources section of the Department of Sanitation Compost Project website at www.nyccompost.org.

Bronx Compost Project
The New York Botanical Garden
(718) 817-8543
www.nybg.org

Brooklyn Urban Composting Project
Brooklyn Botanic Garden
(718) 623-7290
www.bbg.org

Cornell Cooperative Extension
(212) 340-2900
www.cce.cornell.edu/nyc

Green Guerillas
(212) 594-2155
www.greenguerillas.org

GreenThumb
(212) 788-8070
www.greenthumbnyc.org

Manhattan Compost Project
The New York Botanical Garden
(718) 817-8024
www.nybg.org

Queens Compost Project
Queens Botanical Garden
(718) 539-5296
www.queensbotanical.org

Staten Island Compost Project
Staten Island Botanical Garden
(718) 273-0629
www.sibg.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For information on how to reduce waste at home, work, and school, visit the Department of Sanitation NYC WasteLe\$\$ website at www.nycwasteless.com.

For information on grass mulching, composting, and alternative garden care, visit the Department of Sanitation Compost Project website at www.nyccompost.org, or contact the Botanical Garden in your borough.

For information on recycling regulations, call the Sanitation Action Center at (212) 219-8090 or visit the Department of Sanitation website at www.nyc.gov/sanitation.

Or write: Recycling Program
 NYC Department of Sanitation
 P.O. Box 156
 Bowling Green Station
 New York, NY 10274-0156



Don't Litter.
Department of Sanitation
Department of Health