

Personal Safety

Throwing Out Harmful Household Items

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How to properly dispose of paint, batteries, and other items.

Household products are like houseguests: they're good to have around for a time, but can be difficult to get rid of. Not all are like that, of course (guests included). But many common supplies—paints, cleaners, pool chemicals, pesticides for the garden, batteries and more—may be harmful to the environment, pets or people if tossed in a regular trashcan or poured down the drain. Other items are better off being recycled than cluttering landfills. So what should you do? Follow these tips for taking out troublesome trash:

Paint

Try giving away or trading unused or leftover paint with a neighbor or friend. You can also check online or in the phone book for a hazardous waste collection facility nearby or to see if your town offers special collection drives for such castoffs.

Batteries

Car batteries, as well as household (AA, AAA, D, C) and button (used in watches and hearing aids) types, may contain certain metals that can contaminate the ground or air if disposed of improperly. Many communities offer places to recycle batteries. Better yet, consider using rechargeable batteries whenever possible to reduce waste.

Leaves and lawn clippings

Some municipalities require that yard waste (leaves, branches and grass clippings) be separated from other household trash and recycled because they can release harmful gases as they decompose in landfills. Consider leaving grass clippings on the lawn—here, they return nutrients to the soil as they break down. Or gather them in a durable bag that you can easily pull around the yard as you work, then dump everything into a compost pile or a brown paper lawn bag for proper disposal.

Bottles, cans and newspapers

By now, recycling bottles, newspapers and cans is second nature to many people. If the individual recycling bins your town has supplied become damaged or are inadequate, replace them with larger, more durable plastic boxes (first be sure to check that they'll still be picked up).

Computers, eyeglasses, cell phones

All of these items can be recycled or repurposed. Search online to see which local organizations accept

them—for example many retail stores across the country collect cell phones for donating or recycling.

Food scraps

Put food scraps in a backyard or countertop composter and use the results later to enrich your garden soil. With other food waste, choose a trash can with a secure lid so pets, raccoons and other animals won't be able to get into garbage and make a mess or eat something that could make them sick.

Household cleaners

Cleansers and disinfectants, including certain kitchen and bathroom cleaners, can be dangerous to the environment if poured down the drain. Always try to use the least hazardous products. And trust those old wives; their tales of the magic of baking soda and vinegar tend to be true. Baking soda can be used to scour an oven, brush out a toilet bowl or deodorize a carpet, for example. Mix a tablespoon of vinegar with a quart of water in a bucket for a solution that will make your windows shine.

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