

# USE CHEMICALS WITH CARE TO REDUCE HARMFUL EFFECTS

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You probably already know that many of the common household products used for cleaning, home improvement, pest control, or other purposes need to be handled with care. Yet despite label language such as “Danger”, “Caution”, “Warning”, or “Toxic”, we can get so used to household chemicals that we forget they can cause harm if not used, stored, and disposed of properly.

Besides the key words on the label, clues to the environmental danger in many common household chemicals are right there in their intended use. Household chlorine bleach and other anti-bacterial products used as disinfectants are designed to kill bacteria, good and bad indiscriminately. Common pesticides such as ant or wasp killer, flea powder, and rat poison are meant to kill things. Ammonia in window cleaner, paint and paint thinner, air fresheners, and others domestic products can be just as harmful. These substances can cause problems if released to nature especially to sensitive fish, invertebrates, and amphibians in aquatic environments.

Many of these chemicals have nontoxic and biodegradable alternatives. They may require a little more elbow grease or preparation, but are less risky and less costly too! Simple items such as baking soda, vinegar, and club soda can replace a vast assortment of cleaning products. Lemon and herbs can provide fresh scents. Check out the Healthy Home Guide provided by the Recycling & Waste Reduction District of Porter County at <http://www.itmeanstheworld.org/images/pdf/healthy%20home%20guide2.pdf>

What should you do with old, expired, or mystery cans and containers of the products you no longer use? Collectively known as household hazardous waste, these materials should never be poured down the drain, into a storm sewer, on the ground, or in the regular trash. All of these places could allow the material to leach into soil, contaminate groundwater or lakes and streams. Properly dispose of excess oil based paints, cleaners, insecticides, used car fluids, and other chemicals through the regional household hazardous waste collection program. The Lake Michigan Household Hazardous Waste District Mobile Collections start in a community near you in April. Look for the schedule and more tips to be available soon at your county solid waste management district, or at <http://www.nirpc.org/environment/environment.htm>.

Here are some more tips to reduce the risk of household hazardous chemicals reaching region waters.

- ☠ Use hazardous substances like solvents, pesticides, and cleaners in the smallest amounts possible and follow directions on the label exactly.
- ☠ Store hazardous substances properly to avoid leaks and spills
- ☠ Clean up spills immediately when they do occur, use dry absorbents such as kitty litter or sand.
- ☠ Use nontoxic or biodegradable alternatives whenever possible
- ☠ Clean paint brushes and scrub brushes in a sink, not outdoors. Filter and reuse paint thinner.
- ☠ Use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly, in minimum recommended amounts. Avoid application when the forecast calls for rain.

Remember, use chemical with care. They don't belong out there!