



# PAINT A SAFE ENVIRONMENTAL PICTURE

The City of San Diego Household Hazardous Materials Program

**M**ore than 60 percent of the household hazardous wastes collected in the city of San Diego consists of paint and paint products. Chances are you currently have some paint in your garage, ready for a new project or left over from an old job. You can become a better “home environmentalist” by knowing a few important facts about buying, using and disposing of paint.

You cannot throw leftover liquid paint in the trash or pour it down the drain because even latex paint is a hazardous material. The following tips about paint selection and disposal provide information that will help you preserve our environment.

## Know Your Paint

**H**ousehold paints fall into one of two general categories: **latex**, in which the major liquid ingredient is water, and **oil-based**, which contain a solvent that doesn’t mix with water. If you are unsure, check the clean-up instructions on the label. Latex products can be cleaned up with soap and water while clean-up of oil-based products requires a compatible product such as paint thinner. Remember, coatings such as varnish, shellac, polyurethane and stains are also categorized as paints.

Whenever possible, use water-based paint products because they are the safest to use, require no special products for clean-up, dry quickly, flow evenly and can be recycled.



Chemical compounds found in oil-based and latex paint products contribute to air pollution. If disposed in landfills or poured in the sewer or storm drain, paint products can pollute our soil and ground water. Furthermore, paint products contain toxicants which can be inhaled, ingested or absorbed through the skin. So use your paint up or dispose of it properly.

To avoid any health and environmental problems, remember these tips when purchasing, using and disposing of paint and paint-related products.

## Buy Smart

- Use latex (water-based) paint instead of oil-based paint. The majority, 75-80 percent, of today’s household paints are water-based formulations. Avoid the use of aerosol paint

cans, which contain chemicals that may be flammable under pressure.

- Carefully calculate the amount of paint you need and use up what you purchase. An average coverage rate is 400 to 450 square feet per gallon for one-coat coverage. Ask your paint retailer for assistance.
- Read the label carefully. The terms **ORGANIC**, **NATURAL**, **BIODEGRADABLE** and **SAFE** do not necessarily mean the product is non-toxic.



- Buy recycled latex paint! Recycled paint is now available in most communities, and when you buy the recycled product, you help reduce paint collection and recycling costs in the city. Recycled paint is also usually less expensive.

## Put Your Leftover Paint to Use

- If there is only a little paint left in the can, use it up on your project. This extra paint does not cause any variation in color if the surface is light or medium in color. Or use it on the back of a closet or cabinet.
- Return unopened cans to a paint store; most retailers will give you a refund.
- Be a good neighbor! Donate your unopened cans to a community group, church or other local organization.



## Paint Smart

- Paint products can cause irritation if splashed on your skin or in your eyes. To prevent such irritations, always wear nitrile gloves and protective eyewear when you are handling paint products and minimize inhalation of the vapors. If you are extremely sensitive to the fumes, wear a respirator. Protective equipment is available at your local home improvement or safety supply store. If you are pregnant, avoid exposure to all toxic products.
- Always work with paints in a well ventilated area. When painting indoors, always leave two windows open and place fans near windows to create a cross-breeze to carry the fumes outside.



- Avoid using oil-based paints that require thinners for clean-up. As a non-toxic alternative to paint thinner, try soaking paint brushes that have hardened with dried oil-based paint in hot vinegar to clean them.
- If you must use oil-based paints, you can reuse the thinner. Pour out the clear liquid on top, after letting solids settle to the bottom, and use it again. Place the sludge in a sealed can and take it to a household hazardous waste collection event.
- Remember to air out newly-painted rooms, especially bedrooms, before occupying them.
- Be aware of first aid and anti-dote information on paint labels.



### Store Paint Carefully

- Keep containers closed. Open cans cause the paint to dry out and form sludge, and paint may be spilled easily.
- Keep paint products in their original containers. The risk of a child being poisoned increases when toxic substances are transferred into empty food containers. And, in the event of poisoning, the product label is essential to determine the ingredients.

### Practice Proper Disposal

Throwing paint products, including latex paint, and other household hazardous wastes in the trash can endanger the environment and refuse collectors - and it's against the law! To minimize hazardous waste, buy only what you need, and put leftover paint to use. Take paint products, including latex paint, and other household hazardous wastes to a citywide household hazardous waste collection event.

Keep in mind, empty paint product containers can be placed in the trash when the water-based (latex) paint or oil-based paint product containers are **completely empty** with no free-flowing liquid; or when aerosol paint cans have no useable print product inside. Do not puncture the cans or toss them into open fires as some propellant is still inside the container.

For information on collection events, call the Household Hazardous Materials Program Hotline at **235-2111**. For information on used oil recycling options, call the Used Oil Info-line at **235-2105**.



*Sponsored by*

*The City of San Diego Environmental Services and Metropolitan Wastewater Departments and the California Integrated Waste Management Board.*



### THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

NO. 6 OF A SERIES



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**H**ousehold Hazardous Materials Program Hotline..... **235-2111**  
*(All other areas)*..... 1-(800) 246-1233  
**Used Oil Infoline**..... **235-2105**  
**Recycling Hotline: Paper, Glass, Cans**..... **467-0903**  
*(All other areas)*..... 1-(800) 237-2583  
**Paint for Graffiti Removal**  
 Paint Exchange Bank ..... 527-3431  
*(All other areas)*..... 1-(800) 246-1233

### Health Information



**Emergencies**..... **911**  
**Poison Control Center**..... **543-6000**  
**Indoor Air Pollution:**  
 American Lung Association..... 297-3901

### Reporting Hazards

**Air Emissions:**  
 Air Pollution Control District..... 694-3340  
 Oil-Burning, Smoking Vehicles..... 1-(800)-28-SMOKE

**Illegal dumping of hazardous waste:**  
 County Dept. of Environmental Health..... 338-2284  
 Storm Water Pollution Hotline..... 533-3793

**Pesticides:**  
 County Agricultural Commissioner..... 694-2739  
 Internet: [www.sannet.gov/environmental-services/](http://www.sannet.gov/environmental-services/)

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