

MUNICIPAL HAZARDOUS AND SPECIAL WASTE

Municipal hazardous and special wastes are commonly used household, garden and automotive products that can be harmful to the environment, and to public health in some cases, if mishandled or disposed of improperly.

Wastes that are deemed 'hazardous' in this program are easily identified by warning symbols on their labels, and include common household products such as drain cleaners, oven cleaners, bleach, lighter fluid and pool chemicals. These wastes can be corrosive, flammable, reactive or toxic.

'Special wastes', while not necessarily hazardous, can be detrimental to health and the environment if handled improperly and include the following:

- paints and coatings
- pressurized and aerosol containers
- batteries
- portable fire extinguishers
- antifreeze
- pharmaceuticals
- syringes
- fluorescent light bulbs
- fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides, insecticides or pesticides and their containers
- thermostats, thermometers, barometers or other measuring devices, and switches containing mercury
- used oil filters and containers
- solvents

These products should only be used for their intended purpose. Unused products should:

- **not be disposed of in regular garbage because they might leach out of landfills into ground or surface water, and**
- **never be poured down the drain, since they may cause problems with municipal sewage treatment systems that were not designed to handle them.**

Most communities have permanent hazardous waste drop-off depots, or periodic environment days. Call your municipality, or check its web site, for the nearest location.

Waste Diversion Ontario's role

The Minister of the Environment has requested that Waste Diversion Ontario (WDO), which leads the industry-funded blue box program, develop an industry funded waste diversion program for municipal hazardous and special wastes from homes and small businesses.

Many of these collected wastes can be reused or recycled. For example, paint and paint thinners, antifreeze and lead-acid batteries can be recycled, while propane cylinders can be re-certified.

Working with brand owners, WDO will look at financial or other incentives to reuse and recycle these materials, to increase the amount of materials collected, to promote best practices and encourage innovative diversion techniques, and to develop an education program.

Materials will be added to the program in stages beginning with paints, solvents, fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides, insecticides or pesticides, antifreeze, single use dry cell batteries, pressurized containers and used oil filters and containers. WDO's plan for phase one must be delivered to the Minister by May 31, 2007.

Quick facts

- In 2004, a total of 83 municipal programs serving a population of 11.8 million offered hazardous and special waste (HSW) collection programs.
- More than 14,000 tonnes of HSW was recovered from households in 2004. This represents a 9 per cent increase over the 2003 recovery of 13,000 tonnes.
- Of the tonnes recovered in 2004, 7,695 tonnes or 54 per cent were recycled or reused. The remainder was sent for disposal at facilities approved to receive and treat this material.