

“Our World” article, submitted 10-19-04

WINTER STORAGE OF HOME TOXICS

As temperatures begin to drop outside, you may be cleaning out the products in your home or garage in preparation for the winter. As you are sorting, consider these tips:

- 1) **Take proper care of the products you store.** Don't keep water-based paints where temperatures will freeze. Extend the life of latex paint by storing the latex can upside down, to create an airtight seal. When storing 2-cycle fuels from your boat motors, lawn trimmers, etc., make sure they are stabilized so you don't have to pitch them in the spring. Then put the fuel storage container, along with any other flammable products, in a well-ventilated area away from water heaters, light switches, pilot lights, and motors (gasoline can be ignited from a single spark!). Lawn care products such as fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides are not damaged by the thaw-freeze cycle, but should be kept locked up, for poison prevention.
- 2) **Reuse products instead of pitch, if possible.** For instance, reuse old gasoline by diluting to a ratio of at least four parts fresh gasoline to one part old gasoline, and donate paint leftovers to schools or organizations that can use them for art or theatre projects.
- 3) **Know what you are dealing with.** If the label on the paint can says “vinyl,” “acrylic,” or “latex,” the paints are water-based, which are non-toxic when dried out (to speed up the drying, add sawdust or kitty litter, and then place them with your regular trash). Some latex paint that is over ten years old contains mercury, which is toxic. Look for the words *mildew resistant*, *phenyl mercury*, *mercury acetate*, or *mercury succinate* on the label. Another hazard is lead, which was in paints prior to 1973. Don't forget to write on the can the date it was initially opened!
- 4) **Keep hazardous products out of the landfill.** Bring them to the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Site at 705 N. Zeeb Road, a free service to Washtenaw County residents. It is open from 9 am to noon on Saturdays (the last one for this year is December 4th). Most items collected are recycled into an industrial-grade fuel, which powers cement kilns. So before you toss, call the Home Toxics hotline 24 hours a day at 222-3950 for a list of what is accepted, or visit <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org>.
- 5) **Reduce the use of toxics in the first place.** Next year, resolve to look for non-hazardous alternatives, or try to buy only as much as you need to do the job. For instance, it costs Washtenaw County \$6.10/gallon to recycle oil-based paints. Buying more than you need—because it's a better deal—costs society more in the long run!

As you clean, sort, and store, please remember: buy less, recycle more.

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