

Hazardous Waste & Universal Waste (U-Waste)

Wastes Banned From the Trash

Many common products that we use in our daily lives contain potentially hazardous ingredients and require special care when disposed of. It is illegal to dispose of hazardous waste in the garbage, down storm drains, or onto the ground. Chemicals in illegally disposed hazardous waste can be released into the environment and contaminate our air, water, and possibly the food we eat. And by throwing hazardous waste in the garbage, you can cause additional hazards to your garbage handler.

Regulations to protect public health and the environment have been changing. This is because we now know that some common items that have traditionally been thrown in your household's or small business' trash cannot be safely disposed in landfills. These common items are referred to as hazardous waste, and some of them as "[universal waste](#)" (u-waste). As of February 9, 2006, all "u-waste" items are banned from the trash. For additional information on u-waste, please check the [Department of Toxic Substances Control](#) (DTSC) Web site.

The bottom line is that we must keep hazardous materials out of the trash by bringing them somewhere to be recycled or safely disposed such as a household hazardous waste collection facility. Check with your [local waste management agency](#) to find out where to take these items in your area.

What Is Banned?

Lights, Batteries, and Electronics

- **Fluorescent lamps and tubes.** Includes fluorescent tubes, compact fluorescent lamps, metal halide lamps, and sodium vapor lamps.
- **Batteries.** Includes all batteries, AAA, AA, C, D, button cell, 9-volt, and all others, both rechargeable and single use. Also lead-acid batteries such as car batteries.
- **Computer and television monitors.** Most monitors are currently considered hazardous waste when they have lived their life and are ready for recycling or disposal, including cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal diode (LCD), and plasma monitors. Learn about the State program to offset the cost of [proper television and monitor recycling](#)...
- **Electronic devices.** Includes computers, printers, VCRs, cell phones, telephones, radios, and microwave ovens. Refer to "[How do I know if a particular electronic device can't be thrown in the trash?](#)" for more

[More information...](#)

[Where to take hazardous and u-waste...](#)

[Zero Waste home page.](#)

[Used Oil/HHW Home](#)

[Local Government Resources](#)

[Grant Information](#)

[Forms](#)

[Contacts](#)

[Links](#)

[Publications](#)

[Databases](#)

[Events](#)

[Statutes and Regs](#)

[Used Oil Recycling](#)

information.

Mercury-Containing Items

- **Electrical switches and relays.** These typically contain about 3.5 grams of mercury each. Mercury switches can be found in some chest freezers, pre-1972 washing machines, sump pumps, electric space heaters, clothes irons, silent light switches, automobile hood and trunk lights, and ABS brakes.
- **Thermostats that contain mercury.** There is a mercury inside the sealed glass "tilt switch" of the old style thermostats (not the newer electronic kind).
- **Pilot light sensors.** Mercury-containing switches are found in some gas appliances such as stoves, ovens, clothes dryers, water heaters, furnaces, and space heaters.
- **Mercury gauges.** Some gauges, such as barometers, manometers, blood pressure, and vacuum gauges contain mercury.
- **Mercury thermometers.** Mercury thermometers typically contain about a half gram of mercury. Many health clinics, pharmacies and doctor's offices have thermometer exchange programs that will give you a new mercury-free fever thermometer in exchange for your old one.
- **Mercury-added novelties.** Examples include greeting cards that play music when opened; athletic shoes (made before 1997) with flashing lights in soles; and mercury maze games.

Household and Landscape Chemicals

- **Flammables and poisons.** Includes solvent-based (oil) paints and reactive and explosive materials.
- **Acids, oxidizers, and bases.** Includes some pool chemicals and cleaners.
- **Pesticides and herbicides.** Many pesticides and herbicides cannot be disposed in the trash. Consult the product label or check with your [local household hazardous waste agency](#).

Paints and Solvents

- **Latex paint.**
- **Oil-based paint** (also listed under flammables).
- **Nonempty aerosol paint or solvent cans** (all nonempty aerosol cans are banned from the trash).
- **Solvents.** Includes materials such as paint thinners, finger nail polish remover, etc.

Building Materials

- **Asbestos.** Includes some older kinds of cement, roofing, flooring and siding. More information on [asbestos in your home](#) is available from the

U.S. EPA.

- [Treated Wood](#). Includes wood that is treated with chromium copper arsenate (CCA).

Automobile-Related

- **Antifreeze.**
- **Batteries.**
- [Motor oil and filters](#).
- [Tires](#). (Note that tires are not considered hazardous, but automotive tires are banned from the trash for other reasons)

Other

- **Compressed gas cylinders.** Includes propane tanks used for BBQ or plumbing.
- **Needles and sharps generated in home health care.** Includes hypodermic needles, hypodermic needles with syringes, blades, needles with attached tubing, syringes contaminated with biohazardous waste, acupuncture needles, root canal files, broken glass items such as Pasteur pipettes, and blood vials.
- **PCB-containing materials.** Includes paint and ballasts that contain polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB).
- **Photo waste** (silver bearing).
- **Nonempty aerosol cans that contain hazardous materials.** Many products in aerosol cans are toxic. And many aerosol cans contain flammables, like butane, as propellants for products like paint. If your aerosol can is labeled with words like TOXIC or FLAMMABLE don't put it in the trash unless it is completely empty.

How do I know if a particular electronic device can't be thrown in the trash?

The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) has tested many electronic devices including: tube-type and flat panel televisions and computer monitors, laptop computers, computers central processing units (CPU), printers, radios, microwave ovens, video cassette recorders (VCR), cell phones, cordless phones, and telephone answering machines. The devices that DTSC tested contained concentrations of metals (lead and copper) high enough to make them hazardous wastes when they are discarded. **Unless you are sure they are not hazardous, you should presume these types of devices need to be recycled or disposed of as hazardous waste and that they may not be thrown in the trash.**

Last updated: February 16, 2006

Used Oil & Household Hazardous Waste Program <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/HHW/>

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