

Storing and Disposing of Paint from Your Home

Paint is made by mixing dry coloring matter (called pigment) with water, oil, or some other base to dissolve it. The dissolving substance is called a solvent. The two major types of paints are oil-based and water-based paints. Oil-based paints usually use a petrochemical product, such as mineral spirits, toluene or xylene, as a solvent. Oil-based paints include enamels, varnishes, shellacs, lacquers, stains and sealers. Water-based paints, such as latex and water colors, use water as the solvent.



Most homeowners have an average of three gallons of paint stored in their homes. Most of this paint is old and unusable. By volume, paint is the largest category of waste brought to household hazardous waste collection programs.

Why Should I Be Concerned about Old Paint Being Stored Around My House?

Paint contain pigments, solvents and other additives that can be harmful to you and the environment if not properly handled and disposed. In older paints, lead was commonly added to make the paint harder, last longer, and weather better. Because of the harmful health effects of lead, manufacturers have been banned for several years from adding lead to household paints. Until 1990, mercury was used in about 30 percent of latex paints as a preservative and pesticide. In August 1990, mercury was banned by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in latex paints used indoors. Paints containing mercury may be used but now require a warning label.

Both lead and mercury may be found in paint that has been stored for several years. In addition, you should avoid breathing or being exposed to solvents contained in oil-based paints.

FACTS

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Paints manufactured today are more environmentally friendly and by following the tips below for use and storage, homeowners can reduce the amount of paint waste requiring disposal.

Instead of storing old paint around your house, find a use for it or locate a space to safely dispose of or recycle it.

Look for Alternatives to Disposal First

At some point, most of us end up with extra paint. We usually keep the paint in case we need to do touch-ups. Eventually, we throw the paint away, but there are better options.

- Use excess paint to apply a second coat, for touch-ups, or to paint a closet, garage, basement, attic, or some other out-of-the-way spot.
- Give extra paint to someone who can use it: a home hobbyist or friend who may need a small amount of paint for a project; local theater groups, community groups, house rehabilitation organizations, low-income housing programs and schools.
- Return extra paint to the store. Some stores will accept unopened paint. Some paint companies have become involved in recycling paints by remixing and repackaging.
- Take extra paint to a paint exchange or "swap and drop" program.
- Some communities have or will start permanent locations for donating and taking paint. Call your local solid waste management district (listed under County Government in the phone book) or local extension agent for any programs in your community.



If You Do Need to Dispose of Paint from Your Home

If you want to dispose of paint from your home, a good first step is to contact your local solid waste management district to see if you can take it to your local household hazardous waste collection event. Because of the large volume of paint waste from homes, some household collection events no longer take paint. In addition, because paint waste is usually disposed of in a landfill after it is treated anyway, some collection centers advise homeowners to do this on their own, instead of bringing paint waste to them. You should check with your local solid waste management district on collection events in your area and whether they take paint waste.

You can find a listing of local solid waste management districts and a list of household waste collection events at www.epa.ohio.gov/dsiwm/pages/recycpro.aspx.

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Lead in Paint

Although the Consumer Products Safety Commission banned the use of lead in consumer paints in 1978, older homes, especially those built prior to 1978, may have lead-based paint on interior surfaces.

According to U.S. EPA, lead-based paint dust and chips from old paint that is peeling or being removed are dangerous if swallowed or inhaled, especially to small children and pregnant women. For more information about lead-based paints, visit www.epa.gov/lead/index.html.

Homeowners can also search the Earth911 website for paint recycling options in their area by ZIP code at www.earth911.com. This site also includes a lot of good information about paint recycling, use and storage.

If you throw paint away from your home, follow these steps to make disposal safer for the environment. It's important to know that although household wastes such as paint can go to a solid waste landfill, you need to take steps to solidify the waste first, because landfills generally cannot accept liquid wastes. When you are working with paint, make sure you are in a well-ventilated area and are away from children and pets.

For small quantities (less than one gallon):

- Brush the left-over paint on cardboard or newspaper to use it.
- Allow the empty can to dry with the lid off in a well-ventilated area protected from open flame, children, pets and rain. If the amount of the paint is less than one-fourth of the container, the paint should be able to dry in the can. Stirring the paint every few days will speed up drying.

For large quantities (more than one gallon):

- Pour one-half inch layers of paint into a cardboard box lined with plastic. Allow the paint to dry before the next layer of paint is added. Adding an absorbent material, such as kitty litter or sawdust, will speed the drying process.
- Purchase a commercially available paint hardener and add it to the can of liquid paint.

For paint that has separated:

- Pour the clear liquid off the top into a cardboard box lined with plastic. Add enough kitty litter or other absorbent material to absorb all the liquid. Let the remaining paint dry in the can by following the above instructions.
- Whenever setting a dried paint can out for collection, leave the lid off the can so the collector can see the paint is hardened.

Paint Thinners

Used paint thinners, such as turpentine and mineral spirits can be reused. Pour into a clear glass container and seal with a tight lid. Allow the paint particles to settle to the bottom. Pour the clear liquid into the original container for reuse, then dispose of the residue after allowing it to dry. Adding an

absorbent material such as kitty litter or saw dust will speed up drying.

The Next Time You Purchase Paint

To avoid adding old paint cans to your collection, follow the recommendations listed below for purchasing, storing and disposing paint properly.

- Buy only what you need
- Read the label carefully. Purchase the type of paint best suited for your needs, but consider the solvents and additives in the paint.
- Whenever possible, use a water-based paint, since these paints usually don't require the use of hazardous solvents, such as paint thinner, for cleanup.
- Ask the paint store for advice; current formulations of latex paints can be used for most applications without loss of quality or durability.

Extend the Life of Paint through Good Storage Practices

Once you purchase paint, you can extend the life of the remainder by following these good storage practices:

- Store paint in a dry location where temperatures are above freezing.
- Avoid storing paint cans directly on cement floors because the bottom of the can will rust much faster on cement than on other surfaces.
- Clean the rim of the can completely and then replace the lid firmly. Store the paint can upside down to prevent air from entering the container. This will keep the paint usable longer.
- If the stored paint can be mixed and spread smoothly, it's probably usable. Oil-based paint is usable for up to 15 years. Latex paint remains usable for up to 10 years, assuming it has never been exposed to freezing and thawing.

Have Additional Questions?

If you have additional questions about handling paint waste or other household hazardous waste, you can contact Ohio EPA's Division of Solid and Infectious Waste Management at (614) 644-2621.

Tips for Properly Handling Paint Waste from Your Home

Always work in a well ventilated area and away from children and pets.

NEVER work near a source of ignition (open flame, cigarettes, etc.), particularly when handling paints that contain chemical solvent.

NEVER mix chemicals such as cleaners, oils, degreasers, etc., with your paint waste.

NEVER throw paint waste in a burn pile or burn barrel.

NEVER dump liquid paint waste on the ground or down a sewer.