

# **HAZARDOUS WASTE PROJECT:**

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### ***What is “household hazardous waste?”***

“HHW,” generated by either residences or non-commercial boats, includes any liquid, solid, gas, or sludge waste that is **TOXIC**, **FLAMMABLE**, **CORROSIVE**, or **REACTIVE**.

Examples are:

- oil-based paints / stains
- gasoline, kerosene, alcohols
- auto/boat repair products
- chemical cleaning supplies
- solvents / thinners
- pesticides / weed killers
- wood preservatives
- aerosols / adhesives
- pool- and photo-chemicals
- contaminated motor oil or antifreeze (e.g. mixed together or with solvents)

### ***Why should I keep hazardous waste separate from my regular trash?***

Our solid waste facility operators report that they are still finding hazardous items mixed in with garbage. This is risky business! It not only endangers staff with potentially-dangerous exposures but can, and has, led to fires and spills to the environment. Please keep your hazardous waste out of your trash.

### ***How can I get rid of my household hazardous waste?***

This is our most frequently asked question. Typically, we have held two or more collections per year on San Juan Island, and one each on Lopez and Orcas Islands. Shaw and Waldron both had their first collections this last summer. Each collection event offers free products that are deemed reusable, including paints, cleaning, repair, and gardening supplies. Look for news of a collection on your island beginning next Spring.

Remember to recycle your uncontaminated motor oil and antifreeze at solid waste facilities during regular open hours.

### ***What should I do with unwanted paint?***

This is a great question since almost half of the waste collected is still waste paint! You can really help the effort by purchasing only the quantity required to do the job and using paint up or giving it away to others for their use. LATEX paints are usually non-hazardous and can be disposed of with your regular garbage once they are solidified by drying out or mixing with an absorbent (like sawdust). Latex paints older than 1979 may contain lead and are considered hazardous.

### ***What about empty paint cans or other containers that held chemical products?***

A container with less than 1% of its original material is considered empty and can be disposed of with your regular trash.

### ***What about hazardous waste from businesses?***

Island businesses that generate hazardous wastes are invited to participate in our collections. They must pre-register and are expected to pay their own disposal costs.

### ***Where does it all go?***

Final disposal of the waste chemical products collected on the San Juan Islands depends on the hauling contractor used. In the past, we've exported to special landfills in OR and CA, or to incinerators in UT, TX, LA, KS, or to high-temperature cement kilns in B.C., Canada. ENSCO/MSE (now Terris LLC), the contractor selected for the last three years, owns an incinerator in El Dorado, Arkansas that is permitted to burn most wastes, including pesticides, dioxins, and heavy metals. We are currently reviewing disposal options and programs to get the best and safest service for the least money.

Since 1989 when the project began, we've collected about 237 tons of hazardous waste for safe export and disposal from the islands. [Per ton costs are generally down since 1989.] The average number of households participating in our collections has been 350 each year.

### ***Are my hazardous products stored safely?***

No one actually asks this one, but we all should think about where and how our chemical products are stored. Are they safely out of reach of children, pets, wildlife? Are they labeled? Are flammables stored far away from sources of heat? Are pesticides or herbicides sealed in original packaging or, have they been "overpacked" in labeled, sealed clear plastic bags if original packaging has deteriorated in our damp climate? Is ventilation adequate? Are any hazardous liquids stored on shelves where they could be rattled off in an earthquake? **Are your used oil and antifreeze containers covered and stored so they will not collect rainwater before you recycle them?**

### ***How can we reduce our use of chemicals in our home and yard? (my favorite question)***

The easiest way to decrease your use of household chemicals is to choose safer alternatives when you make your purchases. You'll help cut the county's HHW disposal bill and save yourself \$\$\$\$. You'll also be avoiding potentially dangerous situations involving hazardous chemicals--accidental exposure, leaks, spills, or fires. **The Hazardous Waste Project's resource library has a list of suggested safer alternatives to chemicals (plus other useful info on commonly-used products).**

***What should I do with unwanted ammunition, flares, or explosives?*** Please don't bring these to hazardous waste collections or to your island's solid waste facility. Instead, take them to the Sheriff's office for safe management.

***Can we trust product labels?*** The answer is an unequivocal NO because full disclosure on labels is not required of the industry. ["Inert" ingredients, for example, which do not have to be identified on a label, can make up to 99+% of a product; they are often very dangerous chemicals, ones we'd probably choose to avoid, or, at least, to handle with educated awareness.]

More complete health/safety information is available to consumers. By federal law, OSHA requires that retailers or manufacturers supply a free “**MSDS**” (**Materials Safety Data Sheet**) on any chemical product to any consumer. You are advised to request an MSDS before you make a chemical purchase; the info can help you become more “consumer savvy.”

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The “prime directive” of San Juan County’s Hazardous Waste Management Plan is TO REDUCE THE TOXICITY OF THE WASTE STREAM GENERATED IN THE ISLANDS. This can only be done with public awareness and shared responsibility in pollution prevention. Remember that your choices will ultimately affect complex biological systems--in your body and in the larger environment--now and into the future. Thank you for your continued support and participation in the project.

*“...As crude a weapon as the caveman’s club, the chemical barrage has been hurled against the fabric of life--a fabric on the one hand delicate and destructible, on the other hand miraculously tough and resilient, and capable of striking back in unexpected ways...”* [from Rachel Carson’s 1962 book, “Silent Spring,” documenting the devastation of post-WWII chemicals to wildlife and human health.]

For more information or to offer your ideas, please call the **Hazardous Waste Project’s “hotline” at 370-0503 or email [helenv@sjcpublicworks.org](mailto:helenv@sjcpublicworks.org)**  
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