

# How to Identify Household Hazardous Wastes



## Become a label reader

Reading labels is the best way to identify if a product is hazardous. First look for these signal words: **Caution**, **Warning**, **Danger** or **Poison**. Federal law requires labeling of hazardous products by using these signal words. These words don't all mean the same thing. By understanding the difference in the use of the signal words, you can determine how hazardous the product is.

A product labeled "**Caution**" means a mild to moderate hazard. It is not fatal if swallowed, but the product may irritate the skin or make a person sick. "**Warning**" means a moderate hazard. A product labeled "**Danger**" is more toxic. Danger means the product is extremely flammable, corrosive or highly toxic. "**Poison**" means the product is highly toxic, meaning it is harmful or potentially fatal if swallowed.

Once you understand the difference in meaning of the signal words, you can use this information when purchasing products. For example, if you are comparing two bathroom cleaners and one product is labeled with Caution, and another is labeled with Danger, you know the product labeled Caution is less hazardous.

Other terms to look for that indicate the product may be less hazardous include: — Chlorine-free (example: bleach) — Water-based (Example: glues, adhesives, paints) — Plant-based (example: solvents and strippers) be aware that some terms on the label may be misleading, such as "natural" or "environmentally-friendly." There are no regulations defining how these terms may be used.

## Characteristic Words

Characteristic words indicate the type of hazard posed by a product and are usually found after the signal word on the label. The following terms are characteristic words: — Flammable/Combustible: The product can easily catch fire and support a flame. — Corrosive: "Corrosive," "acid," "caustic," "lye," "alkaline," or "causes burns to the skin" mean that the product can burn the skin or eyes. It can also eat away other materials with which it comes into contact. — Toxic: "Poison" or "harmful if swallowed" mean that the product is poisonous and can be harmful or fatal if swallowed, inhaled, or absorbed through the skin. — Reactive: "Do not mix with...." or "store separately from other products" means the product may react violently or produce toxic gas if combined with other substances (examples: certain types of drain cleaners, oven cleaners or other products containing bleach, ammonia or lye).

## Exposure pathways

Household hazardous products can be harmful not only to the environment but also to humans and animals. The ways that chemicals enter the body are called "exposure pathways." The four exposure pathways are:

**1. Contact:** Many chemicals can cause harm by getting on your skin, in your eyes or in your nose or throat. They can irritate or burn exposed areas. Labels may say "avoid skin contact," "wear rubber gloves" or "wash hands after use" to warn people about possible injuries.

**2. Absorption:** Absorption occurs when a substance enters your body through the pores in your skin.

**3. Ingestion:** When you eat or drink something, you ingest it. From the stomach or intestines, poisons enter the bloodstream and are carried throughout the body where some remain for a long time.

**4. Inhalation:** You can breathe in harmful vapors or fumes when liquids evaporate as well as from the mist of aerosol sprays. From the nose or mouth, the vapors go into the lungs and then into the bloodstream. Labels may say "use only with adequate ventilation."

## Product storage

Storing a product properly can help extend its life and prevent accidents.

- Keep products out of reach of children and animals.
- Store all hazardous products on high shelves or in locked cabinets away from food.
- Make sure the lids and caps are tightly sealed and childproofed.
- Store corrosive, flammable, reactive and poisonous products on separate shelves and where they will stay dry.
- Store products that say “prevent freezing” (such as latex paint) indoors.
- Never mix chemicals together (such as bleach and ammonia).
- Keep products away from heat, sparks, flames or other sources of ignition.
- Don’t buy more than you need.
- Keep products in their original containers, and make sure the label is legible.
- For long-term storage, place waterproof transparent tape over product labels to prevent them from falling off.

## Proper disposal of household hazardous waste

Improper disposal of household hazardous waste, such as throwing it in the garbage or pouring it down the drain, could harm your family or garbage hauler. Improper disposal may also contaminate the air, water and soil.

Pipestone County has a household hazardous waste facility for a free convenient place to drop off household hazardous waste and appliances for the public.

## Disposing of Medications & Needles at home

Your unwanted medications & needles may be disposed of in your trash. Follow these precautions to prevent accidental or intentional ingestion.

1. **Keep the medication in its original container.** The labels may contain safety information and the caps are typically childproof. Leaving the content information clearly visible, cover the patient's name with permanent marker.
2. **Modify the contents to discourage consumption.**
  - **Solid medications:** add a small amount of vinegar to pills or capsules to at least partially dissolve them.
  - **Liquid medications:** add enough table salt, flour, or nontoxic powdered spice, such as mustard to make a pungent, unsightly mixture that discourages anyone from eating it.
  - **Blister packs:** wrap packages containing pills in opaque tape like duct tape.
3. **Needles & Syringes.** Can be disposed of by placing them into a hard plastic container such as a Laundry Soap Container.
4. **Seal and conceal.** Tape the medication and/or Needle container lid shut with packing or duct tape and put it inside a non-transparent garbage bag or container such as an empty yogurt or margarine tub to ensure that the contents cannot be seen. Do not conceal medicines in food products because they could be inadvertently consumed by wildlife scavengers.

**Discard the container in your garbage can—do not** place in the recycling bin



## Web Resources

- [www.pipestoneswcd.org](http://www.pipestoneswcd.org) - Pipestone County Conservation & Zoning Office. Information about County Collections and how to properly dispose of your Solid Waste & Recyclables.
- [www.mnpoison.org](http://www.mnpoison.org) - Minnesota Poison Control System. Information about common household products.
- [www.reduce.org](http://www.reduce.org) - Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Tips to reduce the amount and toxicity of waste when you shop, work, and play.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npg/> - NIOSH Pocket Guide to chemical hazards. Type in the name of a product or an ingredient and it will tell you what it is and if it is hazardous.

**Questions, Please Contact the Conservation and Zoning Office at: (507) 825-6765.**