



Solid
Waste
Management
Coordinating
Board

Reducing Harmful Chemicals in Your Home

Prepared for 2009 Community POWER Grantees. Visit RethinkRecycling.com for more information on this and other waste related topics. This information has been approved by county staff and may be reproduced using the credit line below. Be sure to have your county staff contact review any changes made to this document before publishing.

This information has been provided by the Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board through a Community POWER (Partners on Waste Education and Reduction) Grant. Visit RethinkRecycling.com your go-to-guide for waste and recycling in the Twin Cities.

Informational Article 1

You can make simple changes to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals at home by considering the options below:

- **If you have household chemicals that you don't want or need, dispose of them.** Give usable products to a friend or neighbor who will use them up. If products are unusable or you don't know someone who can use them, take them to your county household hazardous waste collection site to be disposed of properly. Visit RethinkRecycling.com for information on acceptable wastes and collection sites.
- **If you have a mercury thermometer in your home, take it to your county household hazardous waste collection site.** The collection sites accept fever and kitchen thermometers that contain mercury. If you need to use a thermometer, use a mercury-free alternative such as an alcohol or digital thermometer.
- **Remove your shoes at the entrance to your home.** Your shoes can track in pollutants from outside. Keep a floor mat at the entrance for visitors.
- **Use a fabric shower curtain instead of a vinyl one.** A vinyl shower curtain or liner releases odors and chemical gases into the air in your home. Use a shower curtain made of canvas, hemp, or polyester instead.



- **Avoid chemical air fresheners.** To freshen the air, open the windows or simmer a mixture of cloves and cinnamon in water.
- **Avoid laundry and dishwasher products that contain chlorine or chlorine bleach (sodium hypochlorite).** If whitening is needed, use non-chlorine bleach with oxygen or hydrogen peroxide.
- **Avoid the chemicals used in dry cleaning.** Clothes that have been dry cleaned release perchlorethylene (perc) gas, a chemical that is suspected to cause cancer. Air out clothes that have been dry cleaned before bringing them in your home. Better yet, buy clothes that don't need dry cleaning, or have clothes cleaned by an alternative cleaning process (green cleaning) that does not result in the release of perc.
- **Use pump spray products instead of aerosols.** Aerosols put unnecessary chemicals in indoor air when you use them in the house, and the mist produced by a pressurized aerosol can is finer and more easily inhaled than the mist from a pump spray.
- **Buy fewer household chemicals.** Use multipurpose cleaners to avoid buying many specialty cleaners. Use single-ingredient products (baking soda, white vinegar, lemon juice, salt) that serve several functions. Sometimes muscle can replace chemicals. Try to dislodge a clog in a drain with a mechanical "snake". Scrub that sink stain with an abrasive sponge. Pay a neighbor kid a nickel per weed to use a dandelion digger instead of weed killer.

Visit RethinkRecycling.com to find disposal options and more information on county household hazardous waste collection sites.

Informational Article 2

Buy less hazardous household products. Read the label.

- Look for products that appear to list all their ingredients on the label.
- Choose products such as cleaners, carpet shampoos, and solvents that are made from plant-based materials. Examples of plant-based materials are citrus, seed, vegetable, or pine oils.
- Choose products that have low or no volatile organic compounds (VOCs). VOCs are toxic chemicals that are released into the air.
- Choose chlorine-free products.
- Choose water-based glues, adhesives, and paints.
- Choose the least hazardous product to do the job. A product with the signal word "Caution" on its label is less hazardous than a product with the signal word "Warning" or "Danger."



You may be tempted to simply buy products marketed as “green” or “environmentally friendly.” It’s important to remember that there are no standard definitions for these terms, and manufacturers are not required to list all of the ingredients in household chemical products.

You may also want to make your own products such as homemade cleaners. Keep in mind that it can be dangerous to mix products or chemicals together. A homemade product will likely be safer if it contains only a few ingredients. Your best bet is to read product labels so that you can choose the least hazardous and most appropriate product for your needs.

Visit RethinkRecycling.com to find disposal options and more information on county household hazardous waste collection sites.

Clarifying Points

- There are differences among the household hazardous waste programs in the six metropolitan counties. Each county manages information and disposal options for household hazardous waste somewhat differently. Contact the staff in your county to find out about resources and information available to you. Visit RethinkRecycling.com to find county contact information.
- Have your county staff review in advance any information about household hazardous waste or collection sites that you propose to use in presentations or handouts. Your county may require you to use a county publication about household hazardous waste instead of preparing your own for distribution.
- Products marketed as “green” or “environmentally friendly” are not necessarily less hazardous than other household products. They may be less hazardous, yet still hazardous, and require special disposal.
- Manufacturers are not required to disclose all of the ingredients in household products such as cleaners. The best way to decide if a product is appropriate for use in your home is to read the label, especially the list of ingredients and the signal words.
- Grantees should not endorse or discourage use of specific brands or products.



Resources

RethinkRecycling.com – Residents and businesses can learn how to create less waste, recycle more and properly dispose of hazardous items. RethinkRecycling.com is sponsored by the metro region's Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board (SWMCB), comprised of the six member counties, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

www.Reduce.org – Visit this website of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, with tips to reduce the amount and toxicity of waste when you shop, work, and play.

www.epa.gov/children – The website of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Children's Health Protection. Find information on environmental risks to children's health and tips to protect children from environmental risks.

www.checnet.org/healthhouse/home/home.asp – The website of the Children's Health Environmental Coalition. Find information on environmental health risks to children and alternatives to conventional dry cleaning.

householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov – The Household Products Database of the National Institutes of Health. Find information about the ingredients in common household products, their potential health effects, and safety and handling.

www.mnpoison.org – The website of the Minnesota Poison Control System. Find information about common household products and poison prevention.

County websites:

Visit RethinkRecycling.com to learn more about how to handle household hazardous waste in your area.

"How to Reduce Toxic Chemicals in your Home" – Produced by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, this booklet gives helpful ideas for reducing toxics exposures in your home. Copies are available by calling the MPCA Learning Resource Center at 651-215-0232.

"Non-Toxic Cleaning Recipes" – Produced by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, this half-page flyer gives recipes for homemade cleaners. Copies are available by calling the MPCA Learning Resource Center at 651-215-0232.

County publications: Your county may have printed information available about its collection site(s). Please contact your county for more information.