

What Every Buyer and Seller Needs to Know about Household Toxins

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We all have many home items that we take for granted. They may be appliances we couldn't live without-say, the refrigerator we absentmindedly open and close several times a day, or the toaster or the coffee maker. Maybe they're products that we might use to keep our home clean, such as vacuum cleaners or liquid cleansers.

But what do you do with these everyday items when they cease to be useful? Maybe they break down, or maybe you bought another item that you prefer more.

What can you do, now that these items have become potentially hazardous household waste? There are several options-some that will quickly relieve you of the items, others that may require you to hang on to them for a while.

In many cases, people toss out the products, such as alkaline batteries and fluorescent light bulbs, with their normal trash. But they shouldn't.

Chemicals in these products can "get into the air, food, water and people's bodies, and we want to keep them where they belong, which is not in those places," says Leslie Kline, Fresno County, Calif.'s recycling coordinator. "Some chemicals like pesticides, we want to make sure they don't get into the ground and the water."

If you do include household hazardous wastes in your trash, they end up in the municipal landfills. While the landfills will hold these items, they're not designed for them, says Luke Serpa, Clovis, Calif.'s assistant public utilities director. The municipal landfill "is not constructed with the same level of containment of a hazardous waste facility," he says. Thus, "it increases the potential that (in the landfill) it will get into the groundwater because it wasn't designed for it."

A California law that went into effect in 2006 bans homeowners from tossing household hazardous wastes such as batteries and compact fluorescent light bulbs into the trash.

The best thing is to properly dispose of these types of items. Call your local government to find out how, where and when.

But if you're looking for quicker disposal options, you may be limited in your choices or have to pay fees.

In the meantime, Kline says, "We're trying to develop a permanent household hazardous waste facility."

The county now provides information that includes a directory of businesses that will recycle various household items, including those that are hazardous wastes.

Appliances

(Microwaves, refrigerators, stoves, washing machines and dryers)

Many appliance stores will take your old ones when you buy new appliances from the businesses.

"If they buy it from us, we take the product here, or the person who does the installation for them will bring it here, and we dispose it for them," co-owner Janet Tafoya-Gilchrist of Bilsten's Appliance in Fresno says. There's no fee. The business accepts a variety of products, including dishwashers, washers, dryers, refrigerators, range hoods, warming drawers, cook-tops and ranges.

It's important that these products are properly disposed of, she says. "They're dangerous to put out. A child can get in there. ... In the case of the refrigerator, the system has to be evacuated of Freon according to (Environmental Protection Agency) standards."

For people who just need to get rid of appliances, she suggests people look through the classified ads. Sometimes, people will post ads offering to take old appliances for a nominal amount, maybe \$5 or \$10, she says. "But that gets (the appliances) off their property, and they get a few couple bucks," she says.

Another option is taking the items to a place such as the Cedar Avenue Recycling and Transfer Station in Fresno. It will take a number of bulky items, including ovens, microwaves, toasters and refrigerators with the compressor removed. However, there is a minimum gate charge of \$50 for the first ton.

"The key is that you get your money's worth if you pack your truck," says Justin Raymond, the routing manager. "If you come with one refrigerator, then bring it with other stuff, too."

Household Cleaners and Painting Products

(Ammonia-based cleaners, aerosol cans, paint, paint thinner and removers)

You can't dump paint down drains or gutters. With latex or water-based paint, put it in kitty litter and allow it to soak up any leftover paint in the can, says Leslie Kline, Fresno County's recycling coordinator. She also encourages people not to overbuy by getting 5-gallon containers when you need less than that. When it's dry, you can place the kitty litter and empty paint can in the trash.

Another option is to take the leftover paint and use it up by painting newspaper pages or pouring the paint into an open plastic bag. Allow the paint to dry out and then place the materials in the trash. However, you can't do these things with oil-based paints. They will have to be taken to a household hazardous waste drop-off site.

For household cleaners and aerosol cans, if they still have solutions inside, give them to friends or neighbors. Otherwise, take them to a household hazardous waste drop-off site.

Household Items

(Fluorescent tubes and compact fluorescent light bulbs, carpeting and padding, propane tanks and batteries, such as alkaline and rechargeable ones)

Many businesses that sell and refill propane tanks will exchange your old one for a new one. But if you're not looking to buy more propane, you can take empty ones, with their valves open, to any Fresno fire station for free, says Ken Shockley, spokesman for the Fresno Fire Department.

As for carpets and carpet padding, one retailer that takes used padding is Big Bob's New & Used Carpet, which has stores in Fresno and Clovis. It accepts used but clean pads at no charge, said President Lee Horwitz. However, it only takes old carpets if you buy a new one from the store.

As for fluorescent lights and alkaline batteries, they have to be taken to a household hazardous waste drop-off site.

A number of retailers will take back rechargeable batteries for free, says Leslie Kline, Fresno County's recycling coordinator. You also can go to www.call2recycle.org to find drop-off locations for re-chargeable batteries and cell phones.

Electronic Waste

(Cell phones and their batteries, TVs, computer monitors, laptops, mice, keyboards, CPUs, printers and fax machines)

Many cell-phone companies have recycling programs that will let you donate or take back used cell phones, batteries and accessories.

You also can take them and other electronic gadgets to businesses that will recycle them. For example, Electronic Recyclers International in Fresno will take cell phones with their batteries (only if they're still inside the cell phones), faxes, printers, keyboards, mice and other unusable electronic products for a fee of 20 cents a pound. "They can bring them by the location, and we have a public receiving" area, says Isela Jaimes, a receptionist for the business.

You also can check with your computer's manufacturer. A number of manufacturers now have recycling programs.

Garden/Pool Products

(Fertilizers, pesticides, pool chemicals, lawn mower gas and oil)

Give remaining fertilizers, pesticides and pool chemicals to friends and neighbors who might want them and can use them. However, make sure the labels and instructions are still readable. Otherwise, take them to a household hazardous waste drop-off site.

As for gas-powered lawn equipment such as lawn mowers, you can put any leftover gasoline into your vehicle, says Phil Babcock, owner of the E.G. Babcock lawn-equipment shop in Fresno. "It'll blend in with the fuel in your tank," he says. If you're worried about additives that might been added to the mower gas, he says, "If you did (this) once every couple of months, it shouldn't be a problem" for your car.

Used oil from lawn mowers can be disposed of as you would with used automotive oil.

Automotive

(Used car oil, antifreeze, batteries and tires)

Many automotive stores and oil-change shops will take used car oil and accept filters for a small fee. A few places also will take antifreeze. In the Fresno area, Certified Collection Centers will pay you 16 cents per gallon for used motor oil.

Lube Plus, which is a Certified Collection Center in Fresno, takes all three. "I'd rather have them bring it in than dump it somewhere because of the environment," says manager Mike Cortez. "A cup of oil can contaminate about three to five gallons of water. We won't feel it, but it's our grandchildren who will."

However, he asks that people only drop off the items during business hours, when there's someone present to accept them.

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