

Guidelines for safe storage

[Your home may be an accident waiting to happen](#)

Many preventable accidents, injuries, illnesses and fires occur in homes due to unsafe storage of hazardous products.

A product is considered hazardous if it has one of more of the following properties:

[Corrosive](#) can burn and destroy living tissues.

[Flammable/combustible](#) can be easily set on fire.

[Explosive/reactive heat](#), sudden shock, pressure or contact with an incompatible substance can cause explosion.

[Toxic](#) can cause injury or death if eaten, inhaled or absorbed through skin.

You can reduce your family's risks of accidental poisonings, exposure to indoor air pollution and accidental fires by safely storing and using hazardous products in your home.

[Identifying household hazardous products](#)

The first step in determining whether your household hazardous products are safely stored is to identify the products and the hazards associated with each product.

You can tell whether a product is hazardous by reading the label. There are two specific sets of federal regulations for labeling hazardous products:

Hazardous products other than pesticides, which can be flammable/combustible, reactive/explosive, corrosive or toxic, are regulated by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

Products containing pesticides, which are designed to be toxic, are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

When reading the product label, look for the signal word and principal hazard information. The labels on both non-pesticide hazardous products and pesticides must contain the appropriate signal word depending on the hazard associated with each product. See Table 1 for information on signal words and other label requirements.

There are more than 27,000 hazardous products targeted for consumer use. You may be surprised at the number of hazardous products you have in your home. By knowing their hazardous properties, you can determine how to safely store these products. Table 2 provides a list of commonly used products and the hazardous property(s) associated with each product.

[Table 1](#)

Non- Pesticide Product Label
Requirements

Danger the product is extremely flammable, extremely corrosive or highly toxic.
Poison the product is highly toxic.
Warning or Caution indicates products with lesser hazards.
Must contain statement "Keep out of reach of children" or its practical equivalent.
Must contain description of the principal hazards involved in using the product. Words and phrases used to describe these hazards include: Flammable, Corrosive, Vapor harmful, Harmful if absorbed through skin

Pesticide product label requirements

Danger or Poison the product is highly toxic.
Warning the product is moderately toxic.
Caution the product is slightly toxic.
Must contain the statement "Keep out of reach of children" on the front label
Must contain information on any fire, explosion or chemical hazards the pesticide poses.
Must contain information on how to avoid the product's hazards.

Table 2

Common hazardous properties of household products.¹

Cleaners

Ammonia-based — toxic and corrosive
Bleach-based — toxic and corrosive
Drain cleaner — toxic, corrosive and reactive
Floor wax/stripper — toxic and flammable

Furniture polish — toxic and flammable
Oven cleaner — toxic and corrosive
Spot remover — toxic, flammable and corrosive
Toilet bowl cleaner — toxic and corrosive

Personal care

Aftershaves — toxic and flammable
Nail polish — toxic and flammable
Nail polish removers — toxic and flammable
Perfume — toxic and flammable

Home improvement

Latex-based paint — toxic
Oil-based paint — toxic and flammable
Solvent-based paint stripper — toxic and flammable
Paint thinner — toxic and flammable
Stain and varnish — toxic and flammable

Automotive

Antifreeze — toxic
Auto battery — toxic and corrosive
Auto body filler catalyst — toxic and reactive
Fluid car wax — toxic, flammable and corrosive
Gasoline — toxic and flammable
Motor oil — toxic and flammable
Windshield wiper fluid — toxic and flammable

Pesticides

Herbicides — toxic
Insecticides — toxic
Moth balls — toxic
Fertilizer (with pesticides) — toxic, corrosive and reactive
Tree root/stump killer — toxic and reactive

Miscellaneous

Air fresheners — toxic and flammable
Charcoal lighter fluid — toxic and flammable
Fabric dye — toxic and corrosive
Swimming pool chemicals — toxic, corrosive and reactive
Shoe polish — toxic and flammable

¹Based on common product formulation. Ingredients may vary, changing a product's hazardous property(s). Refer to actual product label for specific hazards.

Guidelines for safe storage

After you have looked for signal words and identified product hazards, you are ready to move on to the second step. To determine whether your household hazardous products are stored safely, use the following guidelines.

General

- Make sure all products are clearly labeled before storing them. Leave products in their original containers with the contents clearly identified on the labels.
- Write the date of purchase on products before storing them in order to keep track of the age of each product.
- If you are storing products on shelves, be sure the shelves are firmly secured to the walls or are in sturdy structures. The best type of shelf for storing hazardous products has an anti-roll lip.
- Store hazardous products at or below eye level. This will help prevent dangerous spills that could occur when retrieving a product. Avoid storing products more than two-deep on a shelf.
- Avoid storing hazardous products on the floor to prevent containers from accidentally being knocked over.
- Do not allow products to spill or mix together. Toxic or explosive reactions may result. For example, chlorine bleach and ammonia can combine to form a

poisonous gas. Dangerous situations can occur if fertilizers containing ammonium nitrate become contaminated with a petroleum product, such as motor oil or kerosene. Store corrosive, flammable, reactive and toxic products on separate shelves.

- Pesticide products should be stored in a locked cabinet, separate from all other products. If a product has more than one hazardous property, store it according to the hazard classification other than toxic. For example, paint thinner is both toxic and flammable and should be stored with other flammables. If unsure about the properties of a product, store it separately.
 - Do not store a hazardous product in a container that was previously used for a different hazardous product. For example, do not use the same container for storage of gasoline in the summer months and kerosene in the winter months.
 - Before storing products outside or in an unheated space, check with your local MU Extension center, the manufacturer, or distributor to make sure the product will not be destroyed by freezing temperatures.
 - Do not store hazardous products in well-houses. Container leaks and spills could contaminate your drinking water supply.
 - Check the hazardous product containers periodically for deterioration. Ensure that lids are tightly closed.
 - Keep an inventory of the products you have stored so that you do not buy more than you need.
 - Keep containers dry to prevent corrosion. If a product container is beginning to corrode, follow the directions given in the "Securing and Holding" section.
 - For long-term storage, place waterproof transparent tape over product labels to prevent labels from falling off or becoming unreadable.
- [Preventing poisonings](#)
 - Never put hazardous products in food or beverage containers or in a container previously used for another purpose. Children who are unable to read can recognize familiar containers.
 - Never leave hazardous products out in the open and unattended. Be aware that most poisonings occur while the product is in use.
 - Keep products out of the reach of children and animals.
 - Buy hazardous products in childproof packaging.
 - Store all hazardous products in locked cabinets, in cabinets with childproof latches, or in other secure structures.
 - Store all hazardous products away from food items. Do not store pesticides in cabinets near food, medical supplies or cleaning products.
 - Keep the telephone number of your local poison control center posted by the phone in case of an emergency. In Missouri, that phone number is: 800-366-8888.
 - Contact your local poison control center and request poison stickers (i.e. "Mr. Yuk") to place on the hazardous products in your home.
 - If stickers are not available, consider creating a family symbol, such as an unhappy or ugly face, that children can identify and then draw this symbol on each container. When placing any sticker on a product, do not cover important label information.
 - [Reducing indoor air pollution](#)

- Make sure lids and caps are tightly sealed. Many household hazardous products contain solvents that evaporate easily. Fumes can cause indoor air pollution. Evaporation can make the product less effective or more concentrated. This may tempt individuals to use more of the product than is recommended and lead to overexposure.
- Store products containing volatile chemicals, or those that warn of vapors or fumes, in a well-ventilated area.

- Promoting fire safety

- Keep products away from sources of heat, spark, flame or ignition. This is especially important with flammable products and aerosol cans.
- Never store rags contaminated with flammable solvents, such as wood stain, paint stripper and paint remover, inside because they can spontaneously start on fire. Follow the directions on the product label regarding the disposal of solvent-covered rags. If there are no directions, place the rags in an airtight, metal container and properly label the container. Store the container outside your house, away from other structures. Another option may be to volatilize (evaporate) the solvent before throwing the rags away. Check with local officials to find out the recommended disposal option in your area.
- Store gasoline in safety-approved containers only in a well-ventilated area away from all sources of heat, spark, flame or ignition.
- The best container for gasoline or other flammables is a metal container, red in color, that has a cap with a spring so that no liquid can spill if tipped over.
- The can should also be clearly marked FLAMMABLE LIQUID.
- Never bring gasoline into your house and never use gasoline as a cleaning agent.
- Store liquid propane (LP) gas tanks, such as those used with gas-fueled barbecue grills, outdoors and away from all sources of heat, spark, flame or ignition.
- Know where flammable materials are located in your home and how to extinguish them. Keep a working ABC-rated, or Multi-Purpose Dry Chemical, fire extinguisher in your home.

- Securing and holding

- If you have household hazardous products that are no longer usable, check with your local waste authorities about the proper disposal of these products. If the products must be saved for a household hazardous waste collection, follow these procedures for securing and holding the products.
 - Protect the label. Store substances in their original containers. If an item is not in its original container, clearly label the current container with the product's name and the date. Place the words DANGER and DO NOT OPEN on the container.
 - If the product is in a rusting metal or a breakable container, this container should be placed within a larger, plastic container with a tight-fitting lid.
 - A nonflammable absorbent, such as clay-based kitty litter, should be packed around the product container to absorb any possible leaks.

- Warning

- Using flammable materials such as non-clay kitty litter or newspapers for overpacking may lead to spontaneous combustion (fire).
- Clearly label the outside container with the contents and date. Write the words DANGER and DO NOT OPEN on the outside container.
- If the product is flammable, store it away from all sources of heat, spark, flame or ignition.
- Store the container out of the reach of children and animals in a separate, locked cabinet or other secure structure.
- [Personal action](#)
- By safely storing your household hazardous products, you can help to prevent accidental poisonings and other home accidents, reduce indoor air pollution, and promote fire safety.
- You can further limit the risks from household hazardous products by reducing the amount of household hazardous products you purchase.
- Read labels carefully before buying a product. Avoid buying products with labels containing the words caustic, corrosive, danger, explosive, flammable, poison, toxic, volatile or warning.
- Use safer products whenever possible. Safer alternative products can be found in stores. Recipes for cleaning products using common kitchen ingredients, such as baking soda and vinegar, can be found in books available through most libraries and in the Guide to Household Hazardous Products Around the Home, which is described below.
- Buy household hazardous products only in the amount you need for the task at hand.
- Do not entirely rely on the word "nontoxic" on a product's label. A product that qualifies as nontoxic can still contain hazardous ingredients, but not in large enough amounts to cause an acute health reaction. Chronic health hazards are often not considered. Read the entire label for additional health warnings.
- [For more information](#)
- The Guide to Hazardous Products Around the Home is a personal action manual for protecting your health and the environment. This comprehensive, 178-page handbook explains product ingredients, safety issues, disposal, recycling outlets, safer product alternatives, and more! Promoted by Greenpeace, the United Nations Environmental Programme, 50 Simple Things You can do to Save the Earth and The Green Consumer. The Guide was written by the Household Hazardous Waste Project, winner of the 1991 President's Environment and Conservation Challenge Award.
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