

# Household Paint Disposal Guide

## Tips for Handling Unwanted Paint

Paint and related products such as paint thinners and solvents have different disposal methods based on the chemical formula of the product. Proper handling and disposal protects human health and the environment.



## Why Does Proper Disposal of Paint Matter?

Disposing of unwanted paints, solvents and thinners down sinks and drains, onto the ground or into the trash, can overwhelm and damage sewage systems, destroy septic tanks and damage the protective liners of landfills. These items can also contaminate surface and groundwater, which we depend on for drinking water and enjoy for recreation. Follow the paint disposal tips and guidelines described in this leaflet to ease threats to human health and the environment.

## 3R's of Paint - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

### REDUCE

*Reduce the amount of leftover paint from your project.*

- Measure the space and ask your paint dealer, or use an online paint calculator, to help you determine the correct amount of paint for the project.
- If some paint remains, apply additional coats to use it completely.
- Not sure if you'll like a color? Use paint swatches first or purchase a sample size.

### REUSE

*Leftover paint has a shelf life of 10-15 years when stored properly.*

- To keep paint from drying up, seal the paint can properly. Remove any paint from the grooves of the paint can and wipe it clean with a rag. Use a rubber mallet to tap the lid down securely. Don't have a mallet? Cover the can with a piece of wood and then hammer the lid closed.
- Store paint in a cool, dark location like a basement. Store cans on a shelf to keep the bottoms of the cans from rusting due to the moisture in the floor. No basement? A cabinet or closet in your house away from extreme hot or cold temperatures will keep your paint useable.

*Use leftover paint for other projects or give it away.*

- If you have useful quantities of leftover paint, ask friends, neighbors or relatives if they can use it.
- Community centers, animal shelters, housing authorities, places of worship, artists and theater groups may welcome a donation of useable paint. Useable paint has not gone through a freeze-thaw cycle and is free of particulates. Call ahead to make sure that your donation will be accepted.
- Be creative with paint left overs. Paint a birdhouse, a garage wall, or outdoor furniture.

### RECYCLE

#### OIL BASED PAINTS

- Oil based paints are considered a household hazardous waste and should be disposed through household hazardous waste collection events. Check the [recyclesmart.info](http://recyclesmart.info) website for event schedule or ask for the RecycleSmart Household Hazardous Waste flyer.
- Handle paints containing petroleum distillates with great care. They are ignitable and their fumes are potentially harmful. Always follow label directions.
- You can solidify oil-based paints by allowing their volatile contents to evaporate in a well-ventilated area. Then, mix remaining liquids with absorbents and allow it to harden.
- Alternatively, apply leftover paint to scrap lumber or cardboard. Keep children and pets away while these paints are drying. Then place these scraps with your regular trash.

#### SOLVENTS

- You can "recycle" used solvents by allowing paint pigments to settle to the bottom, and later pouring the clarified liquid into a new or recycled (and accurately labeled) container. Mix the remaining solvent/paint sludge with an absorbent and dispose with normal trash.

***Paints containing lead, cadmium or mercury are highly toxic and must be taken to a household hazardous-waste collection.***



## LATEX PAINT DISPOSAL

**DRY IT UP  
THROW IT OUT**

Water-based paint is not hazardous and should be disposed of in the trash.

**DETAILS ON REVERSE ►**

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RecycleSmart

## LATEX PAINT

- Latex paint is also referred to as water-based, acrylic, or emulsion paint. It is comprised mostly of water and is **not** considered a hazardous waste. It can be safely disposed of in your household trash as long as it is **solidified first**.
- To determine if your paint is latex, look at the label and find the 'Cleanup Instructions'. For latex paint, you will be instructed to clean your brushes with 'detergent and water' or 'soap and water'. If you are instructed to use a solvent, like mineral spirits, to clean your brushes or if the words 'alkyd' or 'combustible' are on the label, the paint is not latex based and should be disposed through Grand Traverse County's household hazardous waste collection events. Check the RecycleSmart.info website for event schedule or ask for the RecycleSmart Household Hazardous Waste flyer.
- Latex paint is accepted at any of the Grand Traverse County household hazardous waste events however handling latex paint at home will keep program costs within budget.

## HOW TO SOLIDIFY LATEX (WATER-BASED) PAINT

- **Air dry.** Remove the lid and allow the liquid to evaporate. This works well for small quantities of paint (an inch or two in the bottom of the can), and can take several days.
- **Use a drying agent.** Mix an equal amount of an absorbent material into the can and allow the paint to dry. Use cat litter, sawdust, plaster of Paris, Oil-dri, or "waste paint hardeners" found at home improvement centers as absorbent material. The paint could dry quickly, depending on how much drying agent you include in the can.
- **Pour thin layers** (about 1" of paint) into a cardboard box lined with plastic. Allow the paint to dry one layer at a time until all paint has hardened. Once the paint is thoroughly dry, place it in a regular trash bag and put it out for trash collection.

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## PROTECT OUR COMMUNITY

### DO NOT

dump the paint on the ground or down storm drains where it will travel directly to surface and/or ground water.

### DO NOT

pour paint down the drain. While small amounts of latex paint can safely be washed down the drain to a septic system or wastewater treatment plant, this practice should be kept to a minimum. Limit this to brush cleaning and other clean-up.

### DO NOT

throw liquid paint in the regular trash. It is illegal and leaking paint spills out of waste collection vehicles onto city streets making an unsightly mess that is very difficult to clean up.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit [RecycleSmart.info](http://RecycleSmart.info)

Sign up for our monthly electronic newsletter at [RecycleSmart.info](http://RecycleSmart.info)

Call Grand Traverse County RecycleSmart at 231-941-5555