Household Hazardous Waste Facility Planning

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What exactly is household hazardous waste (HHW)?

Many products found in your home are potentially hazardous waste. They contain chemical compounds that can poison, corrode, explode, or ignite when handled improperly. When discarded they may pose a threat to health, safety and the environment. Look for the signal words on the product label: CAUTION, WARNING, DANGER, POISON.

2. What are examples of potential HHW?

Some examples include:
- adhesives
- lawn chemicals
- paint thinners
- leftover/old gas
- paint strippers
- wood and metal cleaners
- pool chemicals
- oven cleaners
- drain openers
- lighter fluids
- wood preservatives
- insecticides
- herbicides
- fungicides
- rat poisons
- aerosol sprays
- mercury thermometers/thermostats
- paint and adhesive solvents

Although already handled by the private sector, but in order to provide a “one-stop-shop” the facility will also accept antifreeze, auto batteries, used oil and oil filters.

3. How much HHW is out there?

The average U.S. household produces or generates more than 20 pounds of HHW per year. As much as 100 pounds can accumulate in the home, often remaining there until residents move out or do an extensive clean-out. In 2000 alone, Douglas and Sarpy counties will generate approximately 1,200 tons of HHW that may pollute the drinking water, harm our children and pets, or contaminate soil, land and air.

4. Where does HHW go now?

Currently, there is no dedicated facility to accept these items in our community. So with the exception of various local collection efforts, it is suspected that these waste items are poured down the drain, into a storm sewer or end up in the landfill. Homeowners, in their basements and garages, are also storing these wastes. Through the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA), local governments and citizens are working in partnership to design and build a facility. Residents of Douglas and Sarpy counties will have a place to take household hazardous waste items. See the answer to question 26 regarding information on contacting MAPA regarding this program.

5. Why can’t I just throw HHW out with the garbage?

HHW has the potential to injure workers who collect garbage or work at the landfill. In addition even if every precaution is taken, and every regulation followed, there is still the potential for HHW to contaminate the groundwater when it reaches the landfill.

6. What are the dangers of improper disposal of HHW?

HHW are sometimes disposed of improperly by individuals pouring them down the drain, on the ground, into storm sewers, or putting them out with the trash. The dangers of such disposal methods may not be immediately obvious, but certain types of household hazardous waste have the potential to:

- Cause physical injury to sanitation workers
- Contaminate septic tanks or wastewater treatment systems if poured down drains or toilets
- Pollute rivers, lakes, and streams if poured into storm sewers
- Present hazards to children and pets if left around the house
- Contaminate ground water and surface water that is used as a source of drinking water

Never leave household hazardous products or waste within reach of children or pets. When possible, buy products with less harmful ingredients (read the labels) or buy non-hazardous alternatives.

When using a product, read and follow the label directions, never mix it with other products, and use it up entirely.

26 Where can I get more information? What can I do to help? How can I stay current on this project?

There are two ways, one is through the project web site, www.underthesink.org the other is to contact the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA) at (402) 444-6866.

27 Who is the core group working on this project?

Papio-Missouri River Natural Resource District, Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA), Sarpy County Landfill, Douglas County Health Department, Douglas County Environmental Services, City of Omaha, Keep Omaha Beautiful Inc., Inner-City Coalition on the Environment (ICE) and Jacobson-Helgoth Consulting.

Funding for this project is provided in part by the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, Waste Reduction and Recycling Incentive Grants Program.

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7 Will every kind of HHW be accepted?

Certain kinds of household hazardous wastes that already have outlets for disposal in the community will not be accepted. These include ammunition and explosives, pathological and medical waste, radioactive materials, propane cylinders, garbage, empty containers, and non-hazardous products like soap and detergents.

No large drums or barrels can be accepted, and no container larger than five-gallon will be accepted. For unacceptable wastes, residents will be informed as to alternative disposal locations or methods.

8 Where will the HHW Facility be located?

See the companion brochure titled Household Hazardous Waste Facility Planning Potential Sites.

9 Who will be eligible to use the HHW facility?

All residents of Douglas and Sarpy counties are eligible: households only. No waste from farms, businesses, offices, schools or institutions will be accepted.

10 What will the HHW facility look like?

Depending upon where it is located, the facility will be designed to blend in with its surroundings and be totally oriented to providing exceptional customer service. It will be a “customer pleasing” facility. The design is planned to be environmentally friendly and all elements of the facility will comply with, or exceed, applicable building codes, standards of good practice and fire safety regulations. This would include its visual impact as you pass by. Exterior areas for storage or loading will be located “out-of-sight.”

11 Will there be a charge?

Household hazardous waste will be accepted free of charge.

12 Will the facility generate odors?

No. Items will be promptly contained and packaged shortly after their arrival. The facility will be managed in such a manner as to prevent the occurrence of odors, as they would impact facility staff.

13 Will the hours and times the facility is open be convenient for residents?

Plans are for the facility to be open to meet the needs as expressed in the public meetings. We expect that there will be evening and Saturday hours to meet the needs of most residents. Appointments may be made if scheduled drop-off times are not convenient.

14 What kind of HHW disposal activities will take place at the facility and how long will materials be stored there?

None. No disposal activities take place at all. The purpose of the facility is to consolidate what is collected and provide short-term storage until they are picked up for recycling or disposal at other waste disposal facilities. Like the grocery, hardware and automotive store where these products originate, and the location in your home where they are stored, the facility is only another temporary location before they reach their final destination.

15 Who will oversee the HHW facility?

Depending on where the facility is built, that jurisdiction will take the lead in managing the facility (for example, the city or the county). Inter-local agreements will be established to ensure that residents of Douglas and Sarpy counties have convenient access.

A Citizens Advisory Board, which will offer input on the facility’s operation, is a possibility that has worked in other programs. It is hoped that through public forums and the advisory board, citizens will become partners in designing the facility and partners in its operation.

16 What about traffic? Will there be a lot of cars and trucks going in and out of the facility?

Experience at other similar facilities, such as that in Des Moines, Iowa, have proven that normally from 10 - 50 cars visit the facility each day during the four to six hours that it is open to the public. Truck traffic is what one would expect at a typical small business: UPS, postal, and occasionally other delivery trucks. About once every six weeks, a contractor picks up the collected HHW for transport to appropriate disposal facilities.

17 What happens to HHW after it leaves the facility?

HHW is categorized, consolidated and temporarily stored in preparation for transport to HHW recycling, treatment or disposal facilities. These facilities are licensed to environmentally dispose of or recycle HHW.

18 How will I prepare items for disposal?

Each item should be kept in its original container. If it is not in its original container it should be labeled. Never mix two household chemicals in the same container. Check lids and tops to prevent leaks and spills. During transportation to the facility, placing the containers in a lined box is suggested.

19 What will happen when customers arrive at the HHW collection facility?

Each customer will be greeted by a technician, who will then unload HHW from the customer’s vehicle and transfer it inside the facility to the sorting area for processing. The technician will discuss with the citizen the chemicals to ascertain the age or identity of any unlabeled products. Customers will be encouraged to take advantage of the “Swap Shop” before they leave the facility.

20 What is the “Swap Shop” and what types of products will be available?

The “Swap Shop” will offer good, usable products that have been dropped off at the facility. A variety of household cleaners, garden products, automotive products, paints, stains varnishes, and hobby supplies will be generally available. Types and quantities of products will vary depending on what customers drop off. Some limitations are imposed by state law.

21 What about tires and old appliances?

We do not want to duplicate services that are already available. Generally, tire and appliance retailers accept the old items as an extension of their service and dispose of them for a nominal fee. The primary purpose for the facility will be the management of our communities HHW, unless the public expresses other desires and commensurate funding is identified.

22 What should I do with HHW in the meantime?

Read the label for disposal instructions. If the product is designed to go down the drain with normal use (such as household cleaners), it can be flushed down the drain (toilet) with large amounts of water (2 or 3 flushes). Many water-based products may be dried out and placed with the rest of your garbage. Many retailers collect and dispose of HHW which originate at their stores, for example: The tires and appliances as referenced above, auto batteries, rechargeable batteries, waste oil and antifreeze. A great deal of information is available from MAPA, see the answer to question 26.

23 What about the containers that held HHW?

Empty containers that held HHW can be placed in the garbage or recycled where available and allowed. Containers are considered empty when all contents which can be practically removed, have been removed.

24 What are some general tips for storage and use of household chemical products?

- Keep products in their original containers.
- Make sure labels are securely affixed and readable.
- Read the label for proper use and disposal.
- Keep products in a cool, dry place, out of the reach of children.
- Never mix household chemical products.
- Buy only what you need, and then use it all for its intended purpose.
- Dispose of leftover, unwanted and spoiled products properly.

Proper disposal will be offered by the household hazardous waste facility that is being planned.

25 What can I do to reduce HHW risks?

Reduce by purchasing only the amount you need. Reuse the products by donating unused portions to friends or community organizations. Recycle certain kinds of household hazardous wastes that already have outlets for disposal in the community will not be accepted. These include ammunition and explosives, pathological and medical waste, radioactive materials, propane cylinders, garbage, empty containers, and non-hazardous products like soap and detergents. No large drums or barrels can be accepted, and no container larger than five-gallon will be accepted. For unacceptable wastes, residents will be informed as to alternative disposal locations or methods.

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