



Disposal of Leftover Paint*

Americans use three-million gallons of paint every day - more than a billion gallons every year. This amount of paint could fill a lake 20-feet deep, four-miles long and one-mile wide.

Choosing a color is not the only factor to consider when preparing to paint. The kind of paint you use and what you do with it when you're done has a direct impact on the environment. Even clean up of brushes and other paint supplies is important.

'Paint' refers to a range of coating materials separated into two categories, oil-based and latex- or water- based. Paint is oil-based if paint thinner or mineral spirits are required to clean brushes and hands. Paint is latex- or water-based if water is sufficient for clean up.

Oil-based paint and paint products (such as thinners, solvents, stains and finishes) are classified as hazardous by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Approximately 90 percent of household hazardous waste collected is paint. Oil-based paint can damage the environment and human and animal health. If oil-based paint is thrown in the trash in liquid form, it could eventually get into the groundwater.

The average American household has approximately four gallons of old paint sitting around in basements and garages. As a result, collection programs often receive old paint that contains lead and mercury. Lead was banned from paint in 1973, and mercury was banned in 1991.

If your house was painted prior to 1980, the paint could contain dangerous levels of lead. The long-term solutions for eliminating lead-based paint are to remove the paint and replace it with latex or water-based paint. For information on testing paint for lead contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office or your local health department. You may also visit the Kentucky Public Safety Branch website at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/lead.htm> for information on certified lead abatement companies and certified lead-inspection/assessment companies. (Simply

go to the website listed, scroll down the page and click on the Certified Employees and Companies link to access a current listing of individuals and businesses).

Mercury was used in paints prior to 1991 as a fungicide. In August of 1990 paints that contained mercury were required to be labeled for exterior use only. However, in August of 1991 the United States (US) EPA banned mercury in all newly manufactured paint. To determine if your leftover paint (purchased prior to 1991) contains mercury call the paint's manufacturer.

If you have leftover paint that contains lead or mercury contact your local solid waste coordinator or the Kentucky Division of Waste Management at (502) 564-6716 for information on proper disposal.

Did you know... Postconsumer latex paints are now being reprocessed and sold as a designated product under the US EPA Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines (CPG) program. To learn more about the CPG program visit www.epa.gov/cpg. This site provides product information and a supplier database.



Using it up

Create a list of all paint you have stored. If the paint was purchased prior to 1991, is latex, and still looks fresh, try mixing it with other odds and ends of latex paint. The color will turn out beige, gray or muddy. If you like the resulting color, use it in your house. Otherwise, it's fine for a garage, basement, or as a undercoat. As a rule of thumb, do not mix exterior paints with interior paints and remember oil and water do not mix, do not blend oil-based paint with latex- or water-based paint.

Many communities have created ways to "share the wealth" of unused paint. Paint bulking programs collect and mix large quantities of leftover latex paint which is then distributed to

community groups and citizens. Other innovative programs are drop and swaps where local residents drop off unwanted paint and swap it for colors or types that are more useful for their current needs. Often, community groups, churches, schools, and other organizations will accept paint as a donation. Many times these donations are tax deductible. As a rule of thumb, for leftover paint to be considered useable for other individuals or groups, 1/3 gallon of paint should remain in the original container with a legible label.

Disposing of what's left

If your leftover paint is latex-based and dries out before you can use it, you may dispose of it with your other trash.

If the latex paint isn't entirely dry or is moldy, it can be left open outside to evaporate. Stirring periodically speeds up drying, but depending on the amount of paint, the evaporation process could take up to a year. To speed up the paint drying process, add an absorbent material, such as kitty litter, to the paint. Remember to dry paint outdoors, away from children and animals! Once the paint is dry, place the paint can in a plastic lined box with the paint lid removed (so garbage collectors can see that the paint can is empty or completely dried) and dispose with your other household trash.

Oil-based paint is a bigger disposal problem because the volatile hydrocarbons it contains could ignite. Never let it sit open to evaporate - the fumes are toxic and pollute the environment. In addition, many oil-based paints are pigmented with heavy metals like cadmium. If at all possible use up all oil-based paints you have. If you are not able to use all the leftover paint, your next best choice is to take it to a hazardous-waste facility for disposal. Many communities have hazardous waste collection days if a hazardous waste facility is not available. For information on hazardous waste facilities or collection days in your community contact your local chamber of commerce, county solid waste coordinator, or county Cooperative Extension Service Office.

Garbage collectors in some communities will accept oil-based paint that has been dried using an absorbent material, such as kitty litter. Check with your local chamber of commerce,

solid waste coordinator, or the Kentucky Division of Waste Management for guidelines in your county regarding preferred oil-based paint disposal methods.

Never dispose of any kind of paint or paint product by pouring it on the ground or into a sewer or septic tank. This may result in the hazardous materials in the paint leaking into our water supply. Remember - always wash brushes in a sink that directs its wastewater to a wastewater treatment facility.

Next time around...

- Choose water-based paints instead of oil-based.
- Avoid spray paints.
- Avoid exotic colors you aren't likely to reuse.
- Estimate the proper amount needed for the job and buy only what you need. Search the Internet for paint calculators to estimate the amount of paint needed for a specific project or visit www.paint.org.
- Use it up by applying a second coat or touch up.
- Use leftovers on other projects. Properly stored paint will stay in good condition for up to 10 years.



What about other paint products?

Paint strippers, thinners, varnishes, stains, turpentine and glues contain toxic chemicals that can cause air and water pollution and may present health risks. Safe alternatives to strippers include: water, baby oil, butter or margarine to remove paint from hands; and sandpaper, scrapers, heat guns and water-based strippers to remove paint from surfaces.

If you must use one of these products, buy only what you need. If you have some left over, share it with a friend. Landscapers, railroads, nurseries, wood-treating companies, graphic artists, furniture refinishers, small autobody and auto-repair shops, paint contractors, or dry cleaners may be able to use these leftover products.

If you must dispose of them, do it at a household hazardous waste facility or collection center. If a collection program isn't available,

label the product clearly, seal tightly and keep away from children and pets until used up.

Still Not Sure About Paint Disposal...

For more information contact/visit:

- County Cooperative Extension Service Office: check local listings or visit www.ca.uky.edu/county
- County Solid Waste Coordinator: check local listings
- Kentucky Division of Waste Management: call (502) 564-6716 or visit www.waste.ky.gov
- Local Health Department: check local listings
- Earth 911 website: www.earth911.org



*Adapted from: *Facts About Paint*, by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Indiana Recycling Coalition. Adapted for use in Kentucky by Mike Klahr, Boone County Extension Agent for Horticulture, March 1996. Revised by Ashley Osborne, Extension Associate for Environmental and Natural Resource Issues, August 2006.

Additional References:

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