

WRANGELL'S ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE EVENT

Are You Poisoning Your Water?

If someone were to drop a poisonous substance into our community's water supply the act would be considered a serious crime and a state of public emergency would be declared.

When you dump a can of paint thinner or other chemical down the drain or throw out an old car battery with your trash, no alarms are sounded and no news flashes are issued. Yet the impact on your water resources could be just as disastrous.

That is not a far-fetched statement. The average household contains between three and ten gallons of materials that are hazardous to human health or to the natural environment. Collectively, these materials can poison our water if they are not stored carefully and disposed of properly.

What is a Hazardous Material?

Many government environmental agencies consider a substance hazardous if it can catch fire, if it can react or explode when mixed

with other substances, if it is corrosive, or if it is toxic.

This definition includes many things that you probably are storing right now in your garage, basement, bathroom or kitchen. Some, like paint thinner or car batteries, are pretty obvious but there are many that you might not ordinarily think of such as polishes, insecticides and glues.

Dangers of Hazardous Waste

The improper disposal of household waste can cause problems for the entire community. Waste can be explosive or highly flammable. Sewers have exploded and garbage trucks have burned because people have carelessly discarded flammable or reactive waste.

Hazardous waste can also be corrosive. The acid from discarded auto batteries can eat away many substances. Some waste are poisonous to humans or wildlife, while others can cause cancer, birth defects or other serious problems.

Where Do We Put Them?

One of the worst ways to dispose of many hazardous materials is to "just dump them down the drain". Wrangell's wastewater treatment plant is not designed to handle hazardous waste.

Unfortunately, disposal of waste in a landfill has not proven an effective solution either. Without special design the modern sanitary landfill is not equipped to accept hazardous waste. Hazardous waste improperly disposed of in a landfill can pollute the environment through the groundwater, surface water and air.

If the public cannot dispose of most hazardous wastes in the sewer system or a landfill what can be done? This brochure describes some preventative measures you can take in your home to reduce the quantity of waste you must dispose. The Household Hazardous Waste Chart (located at www.wef.org) indicates the best way of dealing with most hazardous materials found in the home. This chart is also available at the Public Works office.

First: Reduce the Amount

You do not need a PhD in chemistry to reduce the use of hazardous waste in your home. The following suggestions can help:

Before you buy a product read the label and make sure that it will do what you want. Once you buy something you are responsible for the proper disposal of it. Read and follow directions on how to use a product and dispose of the container. (There is a good reason why the labels say "do not incinerate" or "do not mix with bleach."). Use safer substitutes when they are available.

Even if you reduce the wastes that must be dealt with as outlined above, there is still the question of what to do with what is left over.

Second: Take Care of the Waste

Even if you reduce the wastes that must be dealt with as outlined above, there is still the question of what to do with what is left over. Recycling is an excellent way of handling some hazardous wastes. Used motor oil, paint thinners and some other solvents can be refined and reused just as aluminum cans are.

Municipal or commercial incineration is another effective means of dealing with some hazardous wastes. However, a specially designed incinerator is needed to destroy hazardous materials. "Incinerators" in your home, such as your fireplace or woodstove, can not get hot enough to destroy hazardous wastes and should **never** be used to destroy waste.

The **Household Hazardous Waste Chart** will guide you in disposing of potentially hazardous material around your home. You should display this chart in a convenient location. Remember to never dump hazardous wastes on the ground, and always check the chart before pouring them down the drain.

What You Can Do in Your Community

By working together the people in the community can plan and create effective systems for managing hazardous waste. The City and Borough of Wrangell sponsors a Household Hazardous Waste collection event on an annual basis. Over the years, this event has helped reduce the amount of hazardous waste in our community while heighten public awareness of the problem.

Successful collection events have helped the Borough protect our community's wastewater treatment plant and sanitation utility from hazardous waste contamination.

Every year the City and Borough of Wrangell is able to collect large quantities of hazardous material on the strength of our 2-day Household Hazardous Waste event.

Wrangell's next free event will be June 29th and 30th, 2021, so be sure to watch for it. Support the program and protect the health and safety of your community by saving and delivering your household waste to the landfill. We also encourage you to:

- Learn as much as you can about your wastewater treatment plant and share that information with your family and friends. Clean water is for everyone.
- Contact your area's hazardous waste agency. They can provide

information on companies which are licensed to handle hazardous wastes along with possible funding sources for such efforts.

What the Future Holds

Billions of dollars have been spent to clean up our lakes and streams. Many millions more have been spent to build and maintain adequate sanitary landfills.

Modern wastewater treatment plants have led us all to expect clean water and a safe environment as a part of our everyday lives. We now realize that we cannot just discharge our wastes into a stream or bury hazardous waste without thinking about their impact on the environment.

For that reason and others, household hazardous waste collection has really caught on. Communities throughout the world have begun to develop programs to deal with household wastes.

Wrangell's local efforts have been very successful and have been historically well attended by our community. For details on what you can do and when the next collection event will be contact the Public Works office at 907-874-3904. Or for further information you can contact the Water Environmental Federation.

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