



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Hazardous materials and hazardous waste can be silent killers; these can be a single chemical substance or a combination of chemical substances, which because of their quantity, concentration or physical, chemical or infectious characteristics, may pose a substantial hazard to human health.

If you take a look around it doesn't matter where, it could be in your household or workplace you will be able find different amounts of chemicals that, if spilled or combined, will cause various degrees of physical discomfort, or even death. It is important to have basic knowledge and be aware about hazardous waste and the different forms of hazardous materials and waste. Some examples of basic household hazardous materials include:

- Household cleaners;
- Abrasive scouring powders;
- Aerosols;
- Ammonia and ammonia-based cleaners;
- Chlorine bleach;
- Drain openers;
- Furniture polish;
- Glass cleaners;
- Outdated pharmaceuticals;
- Oven cleaners;
- Shoe polish;
- Silver polish;
- Spot removers;
- Toilet bowl cleaners;
- Upholstery and carpet cleaners;
- Personal care products;
- Hair-waving lotions;
- Medicated shampoos;
- Nail polish remover; and
- Rubbing alcohol;

Each one of these hazardous material exhibits its own characteristics;

Toxic substances- These are either poisonous and would result in long-term illness if inhaled, ingested or penetrates the skin. Some examples of toxic waste are chlorine gas, Malathion, lead and paint thinners. They usually have warning labels such as: Use in well ventilated spaces.

Flammable substances- They easily ignited. These products include paint, thinners, and other solvents. Substances that are flammable usually carry warning labels such as: Combustible; Do not smoke during use of product; Not to be used near heat or flames.

Corrosive substances- They cause disintegration of materials such as acid in car batteries. Corrosive substances usually carry warning labels such as: Causes severe burns on contact; Can burn eyes, skin, and throat.

Reactive substances- These instantly ignite or produce poisonous vapors when mixed with other substances, or can explode when exposed to heat, air, water or shock. Warning labels include: Danger; Combustible; Not to be used near heat or flames.

Infectious waste- These are known or reasonably expected to contain a pathogen. (e.g. bacteria, viruses, parasites, fungi) or other agents that can cause disease in humans or animals. Infectious wastes are usually found in hospitals and health clinics. Infectious waste includes blood soaked materials, sharps, etc. and would usually be labelled with the BIOHAZARD SIGN.

What do you think happens when you DON'T dispose of dangerous waste properly?

You should never put hazardous household wastes into your rubbish bins or even within your garbage collection system. These types of wastes are not to be disposed of in the sink, or toilet or gutters, or buried in the ground. This is what can happen if you don't use correct disposal methods:

- If you bury your hazardous waste in the garden, the dangerous chemicals and poison can leach into the surface or groundwater. This can affect the soil, plants and water for a long time.
- If you pour your hazardous waste down the sink, the waste may corrode the pipes or block storm-water drains and cause problems at water treatment plants.
- If you put your hazardous waste into the garbage bins, this can put the health and safety of garbage collection workers at risk. It may also pollute waterways and drinking water if sent to normal landfills. Hazardous waste should only be stored in specially designed landfills.

- If you put your hazardous waste into plastic shopping bags, these can create an ugly litter problem if not recycled or disposed of properly. If these bags get into waterways, they may be a threat to wildlife. Most supermarkets now collect plastic bags for recycling.

Illegal disposal, dumping or misuse of wastes is a serious offence and subject to large financial penalties.

WARNING!!

Hazardous waste is dangerous to our health and the environment. Always ensure you read labels carefully and follow the safety precautions before using any substance. It can save your life!

Wondering how you can manage your hazardous waste? Stay tuned next week for more information!

You can share your ideas and questions by sending letters to: “Our Earth, Our Environment”, C/O ECEA Programme, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia, GEORGETOWN, or email us at: eit.epaguyana@gmail.com or follow us on Facebook and Instagram