DON'T THROW THESE IN YOUR TRASH CAN!

Harmful wastes need to be disposed of properly

by Joel Ascan and Michelle Galarion

In our day to day life, we use different kinds of products and generate different types of waste. But we may not know that that some of them may be hazardous to our health and the environment.

Hazardous wastes can cause death, illness, or injury to people or destruction of the environment if improperly treated, stored, transported, or discarded. Hazardous wastes may be ignitable (capable of burning or causing a fire), corrosive (able to corrode steel or harm organisms because of extreme acidic or basic properties), reactive (able to explode or produce toxic cyanide or sulfide gas), or toxic (containing substances that are poisonous).

In the Philippines, R.A. 6969 or the Toxic Substances and Hazardous and Nuclear Waste Control Act mandates control and management of import, manufacture, process, distribution, use, transport, treatment, and disposal of toxic substances and hazardous and nuclear wastes in the country. The Act seeks to protect public health and the environment from unreasonable risks posed by these substances in the Philippines.

Here are some common hazardous wastes generated by households and how to handle them:

1. Household cleaners (all-purpose cleaners)
These contain chemicals such as chlorine, ammonia, organic solvents, and strong fragrances that are very harmful or fatal if swallowed. Some are flammable, and some can cause skin or eye burns. These should not be mixed with other products because these might undergo chemical reactions and cause accidents.

How to dispose properly: Use up according to label directions or offer to others who can use them. Dispose of small amounts by pouring down the drain with lots of water.

2. Paints
Oil-based paint is hazardous because of its vapor that harms human health and its flammability.

How to dispose properly: Never pour paint down drains or allow it to drain into gutters where it can pollute waterways and harm wildlife. Set aside any unused paint for future touch-ups by storing it in an air-tight container in a cool, dry place. If you don't need it anymore, give it to neighbors, friends or family who may find a use for it. If you have to dispose of latex or water-based paint, fill a paper bag with sawdust or sand and pour the remaining latex paint into the bag. Wait for the paint to be absorbed and dispose of the paper bag with your household trash. Do not use this method for oil-based paints, however.

3. Used motor oil
Used oil from one oil change can contaminate one million gallons of fresh water—a years' supply for 50 people. It is insoluble, persistent and can contain toxic chemicals and heavy metals. Furthermore, oil is slow to degrade and can stick to everything from beach sand to bird feathers.

How to dispose properly: Put your used motor oil in a clean plastic container with a tight lid. Never store used oil in a container that once held chemicals, food, or beverages. Also do not mix the oil with anything else, such as antifreeze, solvent, or paint. Take used motor oil to a service station or a company that collects used motor oil for recycling.

4. Fluorescent Lamps
A fluorescent light contains small amounts of mercury, and an incandescent light contains lead. In addition, incandescent light requires the generation of 75 percent extra electricity, which can increase air pollution from carbon dioxide, combustion gasses, particulates and mercury.

COMPUTER MONITORS CAN CONTAIN CARCINOGENS SUCH AS LEAD. PHOTO BY GREENPEACE / NATALIE BEHRING

How to dispose properly: Store used fluorescent lights in a safe place until you can find a recycling company or a hazardous wastes company who can take it.

5. Car Batteries (Lead acid batteries)
The two main components of lead acid batteries are highly corrosive sulfuric acid (H2SO4) and lead, which has been linked to central nervous system damage in humans and animals.

How to dispose properly: Deliver these to a retailer or wholesaler of new lead acid batteries, or a collection center that will deliver the batteries to a facility that recycles these.

6. Ink Cartridges And Toners
Ink is toxic and can affect kidneys. Ink cartridges and toners can be recycled instead of being dumped at landfills where they can become health hazards.

How to dispose properly: Ink cartridges can be refilled or remanufactured (a process of dismantling, draining, cleaning and pressurizing of cartridges so they can be used again.). Have the ink cartridge refilled or bring it to a company who can remanufacture it.

7. Electronic Waste
These are obsolete, defective, end-of-life unwanted electronic appliances such as personal computers, monitors, TVs, printers, audio-visual equipment, mobile phones, and telephones. TVs and computers have cathode ray tube (CRT) monitors that contain carcinogens such as lead, barium, phosphor and other heavy metals.

How to dispose properly: Drop off electronic wastes at recycling companies authorized to handle them. About 70 to 90 percent of materials (by weight) in scrap computer equipment is potentially recyclable/reusable, saving around 70 to 95 percent of energy required in recovering. ■

See the Directory in p22 for a list of recycling centers that can take hazardous wastes. Visit www.emb.gov.ph for a list of registered transporters, treaters, and recyclers of hazardous wastes.