

# Disposal of Latex and Oil-Based Paint

## Leftover Paint: Use it Up!

Paint stays good for a long time: oil-based paint for up to 15 years and latex paint for 10 years. Generally, paint that mixes smoothly when stirred can still be used. If latex paint has been frozen, brush it on a newspaper. If there are no lumps, it hasn't been damaged and can be used.

The best thing to do with usable paint is to use it up! If you can't use your leftover paint, give it to someone who can. Consider giving your paint to:

- Friends and neighbors.
- Local service clubs.
- Theater or school groups.
- Local professional painters.

## Disposal of Latex Paint and Small amounts of Oil-based Paint

Dry out latex and oil-based paint according to the following:



Find an outside work area away from children, pets, and rain. Locked screen porches and balconies work well. Oil-based paint contains solvents and some latex paint contains mercury, so it is important to dry out paint outdoors in a safe place.



Dry it out. Choose one of the drying techniques described below. Paint will take between several hours and several months to dry--it depends on the type and quantity of paint that you have.



Throw the dried paint, cans and other materials in with household garbage at curb side pick up or one of our Collection Sites. Leave lids off cans so trash collectors can see that paint is dry and accept them.

## Paint Drying Techniques

### SOLUTIONS



For small amounts of leftover paint, remove the lid and let the paint dry in the can. Stir the paint occasionally to speed drying. Or, brush paint in layers on newspaper or cardboard.



For large amounts, pour one-inch layers of paint into a cardboard box lined with plastic. Allow the paint to dry one layer at a time--thin layers will speed up drying. Or, mix paint with cat litter, sawdust or sand in a cardboard box lined with plastic and let it dry.



For latex paint that has separated, pour the clear liquid on top into a cardboard box lined with plastic. Mix the liquid with an equal amount of cat litter or other absorbent and let it dry. Let the leftover paint in the bottom of the can dry out using one of the above techniques.

# Storage and Disposal of Paint Facts

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- By volume, paint is the largest category of waste brought into household hazardous waste collection programs.
- In older paints, lead commonly was added to make the paint harder, last longer, and weather better.
- Until 1990, mercury was used in about 30 percent of latex paints as a preservative and pesticide.

Paint is made by mixing dry coloring matter (called pigment) with water, oil, or some other base to dissolve it. The dissolving substance is called a solvent. The two major types of paints are oil-based and water-based paints. Oil-based paints usually use a petrochemical product, such as mineral spirits, toluene or xylene, as a solvent. Oil-based paints include enamels, varnishes, shellacs, lacquers, stains, and sealers. Water-based paints, such as latex and water colors, use water as the solvent.

There is an average of three gallons of paint stored in a home. Most of this paint is old and unusable. By volume, paint is the largest category of waste brought into household hazardous waste collection programs. In paints, the pigment, the solvent, and other additives all can be hazardous. In older paints, lead commonly was added to make the paint harder, last longer, and weather better. Because of lead's hazardous nature, its addition to paint has been banned for many years.

Until 1990, mercury, another hazardous substance, was used in about 30 percent of latex paints as a preservative and pesticide. In August 1990, mercury was banned by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in latex paints used indoors. Exterior paints containing mercury may be used but now require a warning label. Both lead and mercury may be found in paint which has been stored for several years.

To avoid adding to your collection of old paint cans, follow the recommendations listed below for purchasing, storing and disposing of paint properly.

## **Purchasing Paint**

- Buy only what you need.
- Read the label carefully. Purchase the type of paint best suited for your needs, but consider the solvents and additives in the paint. Whenever possible, use a water-based paint, since these paints usually don't require the use of hazardous solvents, such as paint thinner, for cleanup. Ask the paint store for advice; current formulations of latex paints can be used for most applications without loss of quality or durability.

## **Storing Paint**

- Store paint in a dry location where temperatures are above freezing.
- Avoid storing paint cans directly on cement floors, because the bottom of the can will rust much faster on cement than on other surfaces.
- Replace the lid firmly, and store the paint can upside down to prevent air from entering the container. This will keep the paint usable longer.

- For paints that have been stored awhile, if the paint will mix and spread smoothly, it's probably usable. Oil-based paint is usable for up to 15 years. Latex paint remains usable for up to 10 years, assuming it has never been exposed to freezing and thawing.

### **Alternatives to Disposal**

At some point, most of us end up with extra paint. We usually keep the paint in case we ever need to do touch ups. Eventually we throw it away, but usually there are better options.

- Use excess paint to apply a second coat, for touch ups, or to paint a closet, garage, basement, attic, or some other out-of-the-way spot.
- Give extra paint to someone who can use it: A home hobbyist or friend who may need a small amount of paint for a project; A local theatre group. Community theatre groups often can use a wide array of paints for many purposes; House rehabilitation organizations, or low-income housing programs; or Schools for use in art, theatre, woodworking, and construction classes.
- Return extra paint to the store. Some stores will accept unopened paints. Some paint companies have become involved in recycling paints by remixing and repackaging the paint.
- Take extra paint to a paint exchange or "swap and drop" program. Some communities have, or will start, permanent locations for donating and taking paint. Call your local solid waste management district (listed under County Government in the phone book) or local extension agent for any programs in your community.

### **Disposing of Paint**

Before you throw away paint, follow these steps to make disposal safer for the environment.

*For small quantities:*

- Brush the leftover paint on cardboard or newspaper to use it. Allow the empty can to dry with the lid off; OR
- Leave the paint in the can to dry by removing the lid. This should be done in a well-ventilated area protected from open flame, children, pets and rain. If the amount of paint is less than one-fourth of the container, the paint should be able to dry in the can. Stirring the paint every few days will speed up the drying.

*For large quantities:*

- Pour one-half inch layers of paint into a cardboard box lined with plastic. The paint should be allowed to dry before the next layer of paint is added. Adding an absorbent material, such as kitty litter or sawdust, will speed the drying process.

*For paint that has separated:*

- Pour the clear liquid off the top into a cardboard box lined with plastic. Add enough kitty litter or other absorbent material to absorb all the liquid. Let the remaining paint dry in the can by following the above instructions.

Once dried, paint and painted surfaces may be disposed in the trash. Whenever

setting a dried paint can out for trash collection, leave the lid off the can so the collector can see the paint is hardened.

Whatever process is used, proper ventilation is important. Paint fumes can be very hazardous to breathe and can be an explosion hazard.

### **Paint Thinners**

Used paint thinners, turpentine, and mineral spirits can be reused. Pour into a clear glass container and seal with a tight lid. Allow the paint particles to settle to the bottom. Pour the clear liquid into the original container for reuse, then dispose of the residue after allowing it to dry. Adding an absorbent material such as kitty litter or sawdust will speed up the drying.

### **For More Information:**

Ohio EPA  
Division of Solid and  
Infectious Waste Management  
P.O. Box 1049  
Columbus, OH 43216-1049  
(614) 644-2621

#### **Public Interest Center**

P.O. Box 1049  
Columbus, Ohio 43216  
(614) 644-2160

#### **Central District Office**

3232 Alum Creek Drive  
Columbus, Ohio 43207-3417  
(614) 728-3778  
1-800-686-2330

#### **Southeast District Office**

2195 Front Street  
Logan, Ohio 43138  
(614) 385-8501  
1-800-686-7330

#### **Northeast District Office**

2110 E. Aurora Road  
Twinsburg, Ohio 44087  
(330) 425-9171  
1-800-686-6330

#### **Southwest District Office**

401 East Fifth Street  
Dayton, Ohio 45402-2911  
(937) 285-8930  
1-800-686-8930

#### **Northwest District Office**

347 North Dunbridge Road  
Bowling Green, Ohio 43402  
(419) 352-8461  
1-800-686-6330