

Paints & Woodworking Supplies

Paint Facts

Americans buy more than a billion gallons of paint every year. Most of it gets used, but people frequently end up with leftover paint they no longer want. Leftover paint can be a nuisance to dispose of—oil based paints are flammable and cannot be thrown away in the garbage, and waste haulers will not handle wet paint.

Types of Paint

It is important to know whether the paint you're using is water-based or oil-based. **Oil-based paints** are flammable and may contain toxic materials, and need to be disposed of through a household hazardous waste collection program. Paint thinner should be treated as oil-based paint. **Water-based paints** are not hazardous and may be thrown away with regular household garbage IF it is completely dried out and the lids are removed from the cans. Read the label first to determine which type of paint you have. Key words are listed in the table below.



It is a good idea to use water based paints and woodworking supplies whenever possible. Not only are they easier to dispose of and safer to use, they also are better for the air. The use of oil-based paints and other petroleum-based products (solvents, degreasers, etc.) is responsible for 15% of all volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in Denver's air and contributes to smog. If a water-based product is not available, look for the lowest VOC content you can find. Information about the VOC content is printed on the label.

Oil or Water Based Paint?

Key words to tell the difference:

Oil-based

Flammable
Combustible
Varnish
Shellac
Stain
Sealer
Epoxy
Alkyd
Urethane
"Contains petroleum distillates"

Water Based

Latex
"Water-clean up"
Vinyl
Acrylic

Health and Safety Considerations

Paints are mixtures of pigments, resins, and other additives. These ingredients are dissolved in either water (water-based) or organic solvents (oil-based). Oil based paints are particularly hazardous—they are flammable and many contain toxic chemicals. Be sure to read the label first to learn about important safety precautions. Make sure that you have plenty of fresh air and/or use a respirator that is labeled "NIOSH/MHSA Approved for Organic Vapors". Do not use a dust mask, as it will not protect you against solvent vapors. If you experience headaches, nausea, dizziness, and/or difficulty breathing, stop working and call the Poison Control Center or seek medical attention immediately. You may want to use chemical resistant gloves when working with some paints. **Never** use gasoline to clean up paint or paintbrushes.



**Tri-County
Health
Department**

Eleven offices along the front range serving the residents of Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties
Administration Office: 7000 East Belleview Avenue, Suite 301 • Greenwood Village, Colorado 80111
Telephone: 303-220-9200 • Fax: 303-220-9208 • Website: www.tchd.org

Six-Point Program for Leftover Paint

** Information courtesy of the National Paint and Coatings Association*

1. Buy Only The Paint You Need

First, always buy only what you need. That way, you reduce the chance of having any paint leftover in the first place. It's the same idea behind reusing grocery bags, or eliminating excess packaging. When you avoid creating waste at the start, you're practicing "pollution prevention". It's a smart way to help the environment!

2. Store Paint so it Lasts for Years

You don't throw away the loaf of bread just because you used a few slices. You wrap it up and store it, so you can enjoy it again later. It's the same with paint. Did you know that when properly stored, paint can last for years? Just cover the opening with plastic wrap, and make sure the lid fits securely so the paint doesn't leak. Here's the key step: store the paint can upside down. The paint will create a tight seal around the lid, keeping the paint fresh until you need it again.

3. Use Up All Your Paint

Now that you know how to keep your leftover paint fresh for years, don't forget about it. Use it up! Leftover paint can be used on touch-up jobs and smaller projects. You can also blend and mix smaller quantities of similar colors of latex paint to use as a primer on larger jobs, or jobs where the final finish is not critical. (Always make sure you read and follow all label instructions when applying paint.)

4. Recycle the Empty Paint Can

Once you've used up your paint, recycle the empty steel paint cans. Each paint can you recycle is one less can that ends up in a landfill!

5. Donate or Exchange Your Paint

If you just can't use your leftover paint, donate it to community groups, theater groups, schools, churches and others who need or want it. You may even be able to take a tax deduction!

6. As a Last Resort.... Dispose of Paint Properly

Dry leftover latex-based paint and discard it. Let your leftover latex paint air dry away from children and pets. One method is to pour the latex paint into a paper box or bag, and add absorbent material such as shredded newspaper or cat box filler ("kitty litter") to speed drying. Recycle the empty can, and then throw the dried paint away with your normal trash. Make sure you leave the lids off so your waste hauler can tell the can is dried-out or empty.

Remember, air-drying liquid solvent-based paint is generally not recommended, but if the paint has already solidified in a closed can, you can dispose of it in the regular trash.

Save leftover solvent-based paint for collection. Liquid solvent-based paint should not be discarded with normal trash. Instead, save it for a household hazardous waste program in your community.

Aerosol Cans

Aerosol cans containing propellant are explosive if crushed or incinerated, and should not be placed in the trash. If you no longer hear any hissing when you press the nozzle, the can is empty and may be recycled or thrown away. If you need to get rid of a non-hazardous, non-flammable product in an aerosol can, you may empty it by discharging the contents into a cardboard box or paper bag while outdoors and in a well-ventilated area. Full or partially empty aerosol cans should be disposed of through a household hazardous waste collection program.

For more information, contact:

- Tri-County Health Department's **Household Chemical Information Hotline** at (303) 846-6249 or www.tchd.org
- **Earth's 911: The Environmental Hotline** at 1-800-CLEANUP or www.cleanup.org
- Health & Safety Information on Household Products (National Institutes of Health) <http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov>
- National Paint and Coating Association at www.paint.org
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at 303-692-3320