

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS IN THE HOME

"A Hazardous Materials Home Tour"

Right now, in your home, there are probably dozens of hazardous materials that could be very dangerous if you have a fire or that could start a fire if they are stored or used improperly. Protect yourself and your family by becoming familiar with hazardous materials in your home. When using hazardous materials, be sure you have at least two unobstructed exits from the area you are working.

Begin your tour in the bedroom - the last place you'd expect to find hazardous materials. Do you have any aerosol cans of hair spray, deodorant or other personal care products? Aerosol hair spray and similar products are highly flammable not because of the products themselves but because of the flammable propellant gas. Never use them near a heat source or open flame. Aerosol cans can explode if exposed to high temperature. Never dispose of them in trash that will be burned (that includes apartment building incinerator systems).

Nail polish is also flammable as are many other fluids that give off strong vapors. Nail polish and nail polish remover, as well as cotton balls or tissues used to apply them, burn easily if exposed to flame.

The vapors given off by mothballs can also be ignited. Mothball containers should be sealed tight.

In the bathroom, some disinfectants such as toilet bowl cleaners are caustic. Drain-cleaning fluids and powders are extremely caustic and can cause severe chemical burns. Follow the instructions for use printed on the labels of these products.

In the kitchen, cleaning products should be stored and used with care. Some floor and furniture polishes, spot removers and oven cleaners are combustible liquids that can be ignited.

If you are unsure if a product is flammable, read the label. Labels are required to state if the product is a fire hazard.

Flammable Gases

Containers of butane (for refilling lighters) and all aerosol cans should be stored in a cool place. When filling a butane lighter, be sure there is no flame or heat source nearby that could ignite leaking gas.

Natural gas and propane piped into your home are extremely flammable and should be used with care. If you suspect a leak, call the Gas Company, propane supplier or fire department immediately.

Propane cylinders for cooking or heating should always be installed or stored out of doors. Plug cylinder outlets when tanks are not connected for use to protect them from physical damage.

In the Basement or Garage

Your workshop, basement or hobby area is likely to contain many flammable or combustible liquids, such as turpentine, mineral spirits and other solvents; oil-based paint stains and varnishes; and camping stove fuels and charcoal lighter fluid.

Your basement is also likely to house your furnace, boiler and hot-water heater. All are sources of heat and flame that could ignite vapors from those flammable liquids.

It is best to store all flammable liquids outside of your home, in the garage or in a shed. Always store flammable liquids in tightly closed original containers or in approved, labeled safety containers. Never store flammable liquids in glass jars, which can break easily. Rags soaked in oils or paint thinners will burn if exposed to flame. Store them in a sealed metal container or dispose of them after allowing them to dry (or "harden") outdoors.

Gasoline

Use gasoline as a motor fuel only. Treat it with extreme caution, since even a tiny spark can ignite gasoline vapors. Store gasoline outside the home - preferably in a stand alone, locked shed or in the garage and only in containers designed and approved for that purpose.

Refuel gasoline-powered machinery in the open, away from buildings or foliage. Be sure engines are off and cool before refueling. Hot surfaces can ignite gasoline vapors.

Never use gasoline as a substitute for charcoal lighter or as a cleaning solution. The results can be fatal. Never smoke near gasoline.

Hazardous Materials Outdoors

The charcoal lighter and propane commonly used for outdoor cooking are familiar hazardous materials. When starting a charcoal fire, apply starter fluid only to cold charcoal briquettes. Allow the fluid to soak in for 10 minutes before lighting. Never add starter fluid to warm or flaming charcoal.

If you use an outdoor propane grill, follow the manufacturer's instructions and always keep a close eye on the grill.

Other flammable or otherwise hazardous household materials include some weed killers, garden fungicides and fertilizers, pesticides and pool chemicals. Read and follow product instructions carefully. Do not store fertilizers and pool chemicals together, these two products can cause a chemical reaction and ignite spontaneously.

Portable Fire Extinguisher Usage

When using household hazardous materials, have an extinguisher nearby that has been tested and labeled by an independent testing laboratory for use in fighting Class B (flammable liquid) fires. Do not use an extinguisher labeled for only Class A (paper and ordinary combustible) fires. These extinguishers use water to fight the fire and could make a hazardous materials fire worse. Hazardous materials fires should be fought only with extinguishers using a dry chemical extinguishing agent. These extinguishers will be labeled for use on Class B:C fires or on Class A:B:C (Class C fires involve energized electrical equipment.)