

Hazardous Waste Awareness

A hazardous waste is a type of waste that, if improperly managed, poses a serious threat to human health and the environment. Hazardous wastes are generated from many sources ranging from industrial processes to research activities. Here at Northwestern, there are approximately 230 different types of hazardous wastes and more than 200,000 gallons of hazardous waste are generated each year.

It is important to prevent hazardous waste from being released into the environment, as it can be fatal to contaminate wastewater treatment systems if it is not properly managed. Health hazards to children and pets if left around the house, and the environment safe include:

Handling, Storage, and Disposal

All hazardous waste must be stored in such a manner that it will not cause a fire, health, or safety hazard and will be contained so as not to result in a spill. Following safe handling procedures and accurate labelling are also critical requirements in safely managing hazardous waste. As soon as a waste is ready for disposal, qualified and licensed personnel will transport the waste to a facility that can recycle, treat, store or dispose of the waste.

Training

All faculty and staff who work with or near hazardous waste must receive annual training, which includes safe handling, storage, and disposal procedures. If you are not trained or are unfamiliar with procedures, do not handle any hazardous waste and contact your supervisor. If you are unsure if you should be trained, or it has been over a year since your last training, contact your supervisor.



RCRA-compliant hazardous waste storage area in the Evanston Facilities Paint Shop

Resource Conservation and Recovery Act

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) in 1976 to set up a framework for the proper management of hazardous waste. This legislation's trademark theme is "cradle to grave", meaning hazardous waste will be managed safely from the time it is created, while it is transported, treated, and stored, and until it is disposed.

The EPA has tirelessly tried to develop regulations for hazardous waste management that provide adequate protection of human health and the environment while also considering the following:

- Foster environmentally sound recycling and conservation of resources
- Make the rules easier to understand
- Facilitate better compliance
- Provide flexibility in how certain waste is managed

Thus, the EPA created alternative management standards, exclusions, and exemptions for certain types including household hazardous waste, used oil, and universal waste (e.g. light bulbs, batteries, pesticides, mercury-containing equipment, and aerosol cans).

Report Spills & Leaks

If you encounter improperly stored hazardous waste, contact hazardous-waste@northwestern.edu. In the event of a hazardous waste spill or leak, alert others, leave the area, close all doors, and contact [Research Safety](#) immediately.

Learn more: Complete [Hazardous Waste Awareness](#) training.

Report all injuries on the Risk Management [website](#) or 847.491.5084.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review the various ways to improve hazardous waste storage, handling, and disposal in your work place.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

- Follow instructions for handling, storage, and disposal provided on product labels.
- When leftovers remain, never mix hazardous waste with other products as incompatible materials may react, ignite, or explode.
- Check with your local environmental, health, or solid waste agency for more information on household hazardous waste management options in your area.

For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936.

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management at gwen.butler@northwestern.edu for details.