

# HOUSEHOLD HAZMAT: What You Need to Know to Keep Your Family Safe

Although a part of our daily lives, many common products kept in and around the home contain hazardous materials, such as heavy metals or chemicals that are known to be toxic, corrosive or flammable. Storing and disposing of them with care can help limit exposure to these substances—which is healthier for people, pets and our environment.

## The Problem with Mercury

Mercury is an element found in common household items including **compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs)** and **tubes, thermostats, thermometers and batteries**. It's an extremely toxic element that can damage the brain, kidney and lungs and impair the normal development of the brain and nervous system in fetuses or young children. If a product containing mercury breaks, important steps must be taken to ensure the safety of everyone in the house.



## What to do if a CFL Breaks

- 1 Have people and pets **leave the room right away**.
- 2 Open windows or doors to **ventilate the room** for 10-15 minutes before returning to clean it up. Turn off the central heating and air for several hours.
- 3 Thoroughly **collect the broken glass and visible powder**, but try not to touch it directly. Wear protective gloves or consider using a bar of soap to pick up the pieces.
- 4 Place clean-up materials in a **sealed container** or two sealed plastic bags before discarding.

Sources: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)  
Robert Jaffin



## Beware of Battery Risks



*Americans buy almost 3 billion dry-cell batteries every year (about 32 per family) to power toys, portable tools and electronic devices.*

Source: EPA

- Batteries contain a variety of heavy metals and corrosive acids that generate power by converting chemical energy to electrical energy. However, these toxic ingredients have the potential to **cause burns or injury** to the skin or eyes.
- Rechargeable lithium ion batteries, in rare instances, pose a **fire risk** because they may overheat and ignite if they fail. Lithium ion batteries are found in notebook computers, mobile phones, cameras, ride-on toy vehicles and radio-controlled cars and aircraft.
- Lithium batteries are not only a **choking hazard** for small children and pets, but they pose the risk of serious **internal injuries** if swallowed. Always keep button-cell batteries well out of reach of children and pets. If you suspect that one has been ingested, seek medical attention immediately.



Do not throw used batteries or CFLs in the trash. To prevent toxins from releasing into the air, soil or water, contact your local public works department or go to **earth911.com** for disposal information.

# **Do not dump household liquids down storm drains or sewers or throw hazardous materials into trash bins for collection.**

Many state and local governments ban the disposal of hazardous materials into standard household trash. Contact your local waste collection agency or visit [earth911.com](http://earth911.com) to enter your zip code and learn about the specific disposal options and recycling locations near you.

*American households produce over 4 million pounds of household hazardous waste every day.*

Source: University of Utah



## What's Hazardous in Your Household?

Drop these items off at dedicated hazardous materials facilities or retail establishments that serve as collection centers for certain types of used goods. Most communities also host collections several times each year.

### Home Maintenance

- All Purpose Cleaners
- Disinfectants
- Drain Openers
- Furniture Polish
- Oven Cleaners
- Oil-Based or Latex Paints
- Varnishes
- Solvents & Thinners
- Glues/Adhesives

### Automobile

- Tires
- Car or Boat Batteries
- Fluids, Oil & Filters
- Antifreeze
- Tire Treatments
- Car Wax

### Products with Mercury

- Fluorescent Tubes and Bulbs
- Thermostats
- Thermometers
- Barometers
- Manometers

### Electronics

- TVs/Video Players
- Computers/Monitors
- Stereo Equipment
- Microwaves
- Wireless Phones
- Batteries

### Flammable Fuels

- Gasoline or Diesel
- Lighter Fluid
- Kerosene
- Propane Canisters
- Cooking Oil

### Garden/Outdoors

- Fertilizers
- Pesticides
- Pool Chemicals

### Miscellaneous

- Nail Polish/Removers with Acetone
- Aerosol Cans (not empty)
- Medical Waste/Sharps
- Over-the-Counter and Prescription Drugs



**CFLs** should always be handled gently and recycled, as they release mercury vapor into the air if broken. Some major home and hardware retailers offer in-store collection to make recycling more convenient.



When **batteries** are incinerated or left in landfills, metals can pollute the air or leach into the soil or water supply. Several states have regulations in place that mandate the recycling of certain types of batteries. The EPA recommends using rechargeable options when available and recycling all power cells.

