

What is the best way to recycle my old and/or unwanted paint, primer and stains?

Published Sunday, Jul. 5, 2015, 3:29 pm



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Dear EarthTalk: What is the best way to recycle my old and/or unwanted paint, primer and stains? —*Kim Beeler, Lake Oswego, OR*

Has one of the many popular shows on HGTV inspired you to renovate your own home? If so, you're not alone! Home renovations have been on the rise the last few years in the U.S. and Canada, which can mean lots of leftover paint. Extra paint can last for years when properly sealed and stored away from extreme heat and cold, and if unneeded, can be donated to organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Keep America Beautiful. But if paint can no longer be used, what are some safe, environmentally-responsible ways to dispose of it?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that about 10 percent of the house paint purchased in the United States each year—about 65 to 69 million gallons—is discarded. Leftover and unusable paint wastes causes pollution when disposed of improperly, the EPA warns. Before you can decide how to dispose of old paint, you'll need to determine what kind of paint it is. There are two types of paint: oil-based and latex; and regulations on disposal of each type of paint vary by location.

In some areas, latex paint can be thrown out with the trash as long as it is completely dried. Keep in mind that some household waste haulers may not pick up latex paint even if it is completely dried, so always check with your local waste disposal service provider on rules and regulations applicable to your area.



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Oil-based paints, as well as paint thinners and other paint solvents, are considered hazardous household waste (HHW) and are typically disposed of at HHW facilities. While many communities across the country will hold annual or semi-annual HHW collection days to make paint disposal easy for local residents, the new non-profit PaintCare is allowing residents of California, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Oregon, Minnesota and Vermont to have convenient disposal of house paint, primers, stains, sealers and clear coatings year-round. There is no charge for dropping off paint at a PaintCare drop-off site, and Paintcare's site locator (available on their website and app) allows residents of applicable states to quickly find their closest drop-off location. PaintCare locations can be found at select Sherwin-Williams, True Value, Ace Hardware and other retailers.

"Retailer support of the PaintCare program is not only good business practice, but also an extension of good customer service," says Scott Cassel, Chief Executive Officer of the Product Stewardship Institute, Inc., a nonprofit that in partnership with the paint industry, led the national dialogue that laid the foundation for the PaintCare program. "By providing paint drop-off locations, retailers not only encourage more foot traffic, but they also offer an important kind of community service that addresses both environmental protection and convenience."

PaintCare manages the leftover paint it receives according to a policy of "highest, best use." Their goal is to recycle as much as possible. Most of the oil-based paint is taken to a cement plant where it is blended into a fuel and burned to recover the energy value. Latex paint that is not rusty, molding or spoiled is sent to recycling companies and reprocessed into new paint. Some paint that the non-profit receives is nearly new and in excellent condition, and is given away at swap shops or to charitable organizations. Paintcare plans to expand its locations into Colorado in July of 2015, Maine in August of 2015 and the District of Columbia in January of 2016.

CONTACTS: EPA Paints & Coatings Program, www.epa.gov/sectors/sectorinfo/sectorprofiles/paint.html; Paintcare, www.paintcare.org.

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