

Household Hazardous Waste: 2008 Survey Results



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

Land Quality Division
Solid Waste Program
811 SW 6th Avenue
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 229-5479
(800) 452-4011
Fax: (503) 229-6977
Contact: David Allaway
www.oregon.gov/DEQ/

This fact sheet summarizes a 2008 telephone survey of Oregon households regarding their purchase, use and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes.

DEQ commissioned this survey to help in the design and evaluation of public information and outreach efforts, and for broader program development and evaluation purposes. The survey addressed hazardous substances and wastes commonly found in homes, as well as three specific product categories: lawn pesticides, strong household cleaners, and lead fishing weights.

What is household hazardous waste?

Household hazardous waste (HHW) includes a wide range of products that are commonly found in homes but are hazardous because they are highly flammable, corrosive, reactive, or poisonous. Common examples include some lawn and garden herbicides, insecticides, items containing lead or mercury such as thermostats and thermometers, household cleaners, paints, pool and spa chemicals, and automotive products.



Common hazardous household products.

These products may pose risks to people and the environment. In some cases, these risks occur when the products are used, or stored improperly. In other cases, the risks occur when the products are disposed of.

Survey methodology

The survey was administered by telephone to randomly-selected Oregon households in January of 2008. A total of 615 Oregonians completed the full survey, which included questions about

use and perception of hazardous products, lawn care and use of pesticides, use of household cleaners, use of fishing weights, and demographics. An additional 188 respondents who had fished within the past year completed a fishing oversample survey, which only included questions about fishing weights and demographics. Portland State University's Survey Research Lab designed and administered the survey, and also evaluated survey results.

Key findings

General Questions

- Respondents understand that not all products are equally hazardous. For example, 72% of Oregonians rated drain opener as "very dangerous" compared to only 13% who rated compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) as "very dangerous."
- The majority of respondents who purchased latex paint (70%), oil-based paint (64%) or pharmaceuticals (67%) reported having leftovers they wanted to get rid of. In contrast, fewer purchasing households reported having leftover lawn chemicals (21%) or chlorine used in pools or hot tubs (10%).
- Respondents did not manage all categories of leftover products in the same manner. The majority (64%) of households with leftover oil-based paint reported delivering it to a household hazardous waste (HHW) collection event or facility, while only 10% reported putting it in their garbage.

Half of households (50%) with leftover latex-based paint reported taking it to a HHW collection event or facility, while 16% reported putting dried latex paint in the garbage.

In contrast, leftover pharmaceuticals were most commonly either flushed (43%) or put in the garbage (42%).

Similarly, CFLs were most frequently thrown in the garbage (49%).

The majority of respondents were willing to return their old CFLs to the store (89%) or willing (either always or sometimes) to return their unwanted pharmaceuticals to the pharmacy (90%) or by mail (85%), if such services were offered.

- Respondents living in areas with HHW collection services were generally more likely to recycle or safely dispose of their hazardous household waste.
- Nearly all respondents agreed that manufacturers should be required to provide a complete list of ingredients in their products (95%) and also agreed that manufacturers should be required to share in the responsibility for safely recycling or disposing of their products (89%).
- Almost half (47%) of all respondents accepted an offer of information on safer alternatives and proper handling of hazardous household waste.

Lawn Care and Lawn Pesticides

- Only 31% of respondents believed that lawn chemicals they find in the store are safe for people and the environment.
- Nearly half of respondents reported using a spot spray chemical weed killer (47%) or a combination weed and feed product (44%) on their lawn in the past year.
- Respondents who reported leaving grass clippings on the lawn after mowing or watering less frequently in the summer were also less likely to use lawn pesticides.
- Among respondents who reported using only conventional chemical products on their lawn, as opposed to organic or natural methods, 69% agreed that they don't use natural methods of lawn care because they don't know enough about them.

Strong Household Cleaners

Nearly all respondents (94%) had experienced clogged drains and 70% had taken steps to prevent clogs in the first place. Commercial drain cleaners were the most common method used to unclog drains, with fast-acting chemical products being the most commonly used type of drain cleaner.

Half of all respondents (52%) used a self-cleaning system to clean their oven, with only 17% having used a conventional chemical oven cleaner.

A significant number of respondents (20%) reported experiencing harmful health effects because of exposure to cleaning products at home.

Lead Fishing Weights

Only 24% of full respondents reported having fished within the past year.

A majority (82%) of the respondents who fish reported using lead weights, while another 9% didn't know if their weights contained lead or not.

Among users of lead weights, 16% report making their own weights, with the largest proportion of those (37%) making lead weights in their garage.

Download the survey report

The full survey report is available on DEQ's Web site, at <http://www.deq.state.or.us/pubs/reports.htm#HHW>.

For more information

Contact David Allaway, (503) 229-5479 (toll-free in OR at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5479) or Abby Boudouris, (503) 229-6108 (toll-free in OR at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 6108) in DEQ's Solid Waste Program in Portland.

Alternative formats

Alternative formats (Braille, large type) of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications & Outreach, Portland, at (503) 229-5696, or call toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696.