

# Q&A

NESC

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**Editor's Note:**  
This column is based on calls received over the National Environmental Services Center (NESC) technical assistance hotline. If you have further questions concerning household cleaning products, call (800) 624-8301 or (304) 293-4191 and ask to speak with a technical assistant.



## Household Hazards



### What's a safe alternative for household cleaning solutions?

Americans produce 1.6 million tons of household hazardous waste every year (Earth's 911, 2000)? What is household hazardous waste? Well, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines these household products as flammable, combustible, toxic, explosive/reactive, or corrosive. Some of these products you are probably already aware of. For example, it is well known that brake fluid, antifreeze, pool chemicals, and varnishes can be very dangerous if not stored, used, or disposed of properly. But did you know that nail polishes/removers, moth balls, charcoal lighter fluid, and fluorescent lights can also cause significant damage to humans, vegetation, wildlife, and other environmental resources? Problems usually arise when these chemicals leak and/or spill from their containers. If the spill interacts with other chemicals, toxic gases can form or even explode. Another significant problem can occur when these spills take place outside, in driveways or lawns. A simple rain can sweep these chemicals into larger water bodies or groundwater—polluting healthy areas and damaging the ecosystems that depend on them.

Take a look at the **table below** to see how many potentially dangerous products are stored in your home (MPCA, 2002).

It is estimated that the average American home stores up to 100 pounds of household hazardous waste. (Earth's 911) A great way to prevent accidents and make your home safe is to limit the amount of household hazardous waste stored in and around your home. By limiting the storage of these products, you reduce the risk of accidents in your home and the environment around it. The Health Department of Tacoma-Pierce County, Washington, has provided an extensive **table (on the facing page)** containing alternative cleaning solutions for everyday home maintenance. Some of the solutions may surprise you, as the ingredients can be gathered around the home or purchased for a low cost.

### Cleaning Hints

- Wear gloves to protect your hands.
- Use the simplest, mildest cleaner that can do the job.
- Never mix bleach with an ammonia containing product. A poisonous gas will be produced.

**Note:** NESC does not guarantee the effectiveness of any and all alternative cleaning solutions. Use these and all other solutions with CAUTION. Keep these solutions and all other cleaning supplies out of reach of children.

Automotive Improvement	Household Items	Lawn and Garden	Home
Auto batteries	Aerosol products	Bug spray	Concrete cleaner
Brake fluid	Button batteries	Charcoal lighter fluid	Driveway sealer
Carburetor cleaner	Batteries	Fertilizer (w/weed killer)	Furniture stripper
Degreasers	Drain cleaners	Insect killer	Glue (w/solvents)
Fuels	Fluorescent lights	Pool chemicals	Latex paint
Oil filters	Mothballs	Rodent bait	Oil-based paint
Used antifreeze	Nail polish/remover	Weed killer	Paint remover
Used motor oil	Oven cleaner		Paint thinner
	Polish w/solvents		Roofing tar
	Spot removers		Stain/varnish
	Thermometers (Hg)		Wood preservatives