

Safe Use of Household Chemicals

NB It is illegal to store pesticides in containers other than the original, properly labelled containers.

Some household products, such as detergents and soap powders bought in large quantities, may be repacked into containers other than the original, in the event of damage or breakage. In this case the container must:

- be clearly and properly labelled
- not be attractive to children
- not be mistaken for a food or drink container.

Disposing Of Unwanted Chemicals

- ✓ Empty containers may be wrapped and placed in the rubbish bin.
- ✓ Recycle if possible. Your local rubbish tip, garage or larger auto retail shops may have collection points for recycling engine oil. Paints and solvents (thinners, turpentine, lacquers) can be recycled by industry.
- ✓ Avoid the problem of disposing of unwanted chemicals by buying only the amount required. Where this is not possible, store leftover chemicals safely for later use.
- ✗ Do not hoard chemicals.
- ✗ Do not put unwanted pesticides, fuels, solvents or other dangerous chemicals in the rubbish bin, down the drain or in the backyard.

Additional advice on how to dispose of unwanted chemicals is available from your local government or the Office of Waste Management of the Department of Environmental Protection on (08) 9222 7000

What to do in the case of poisoning

Simple First Aid

- ✓ Remain calm
- ✓ Identify the poison.
- ✓ Remove the person from the poison i.e. either
- ✓ Move to fresh air

- Remove contaminated clothing
- Wash skin with soap and water
- Flush eyes with running water or
- Induce vomiting, only if appropriate, with IPECAC syrup (you should keep this in your first aid box) or by tickling the back of the throat with your fingers.

NB: Induced vomiting is appropriate when certain medicines have been swallowed. For all household chemicals check the label to see if induced vomiting is recommended when the product is swallowed.

✗ DO NOT INDUCE VOMITING

- if it is not recommended on the label
- if the person is unconscious, drowsy or convulsing
- if the person has swallowed:
 - ☞ sleeping pills or tranquillisers
 - ☞ acids (e.g. battery acid, spirits of salts)
 - ☞ alkalis (e.g. caustic soda, oven or drain cleaners, ammonia, bleaches, strong detergents)
 - ☞ liquid hydrocarbons (petrol, kerosene or mineral turpentine)
 - ☞ camphor or camphorated oil.

Instructions on the label should make it clear whether vomiting is recommended or not.

Get help

- ✓ Contact the POISONS INFORMATION CENTRE on 131126 or a doctor and follow their instructions.
- ✓ Check the label on the product for a number to contact the manufacturer for help.
- ✓ Ask a family member or neighbour for assistance.
- ✓ Take the person to a doctor or the hospital as soon as possible and take with you the chemical, its container (make sure the label is on it) and any vomited material.
- ✗ Do not drive yourself if you are affected. Have someone else take you.

Summary

Checklist for safe use of chemicals

- ✓ Buy the right chemical for the job
- ✓ As far as possible, buy only the amount required to do the job
- ✓ Read the label carefully
- ✓ Be aware of the first aid instructions
- ✓ Follow all other instructions closely
- ✓ Use only as directed
- ✓ Handle carefully
- ✓ Keep away from children
- ✓ Store only in original container
- ✓ Store in a secure place
- ✓ Dispose of unwanted chemicals properly
- ✓ Educate children on the safe handling of chemicals
- ✓ Take special care if you are one of a special group of people (e.g. older people, visually impaired).

Other leaflets available:

Using Pesticides Safely

Pesticides and Health

Pesticide Transportation, Storage and Disposal

Further information:

For further advice contact

your local government Environmental Health Officer

or

Environmental Health Directorate

Telephone: (08) 9388 4999

Facsimile: (08) 9388 4955

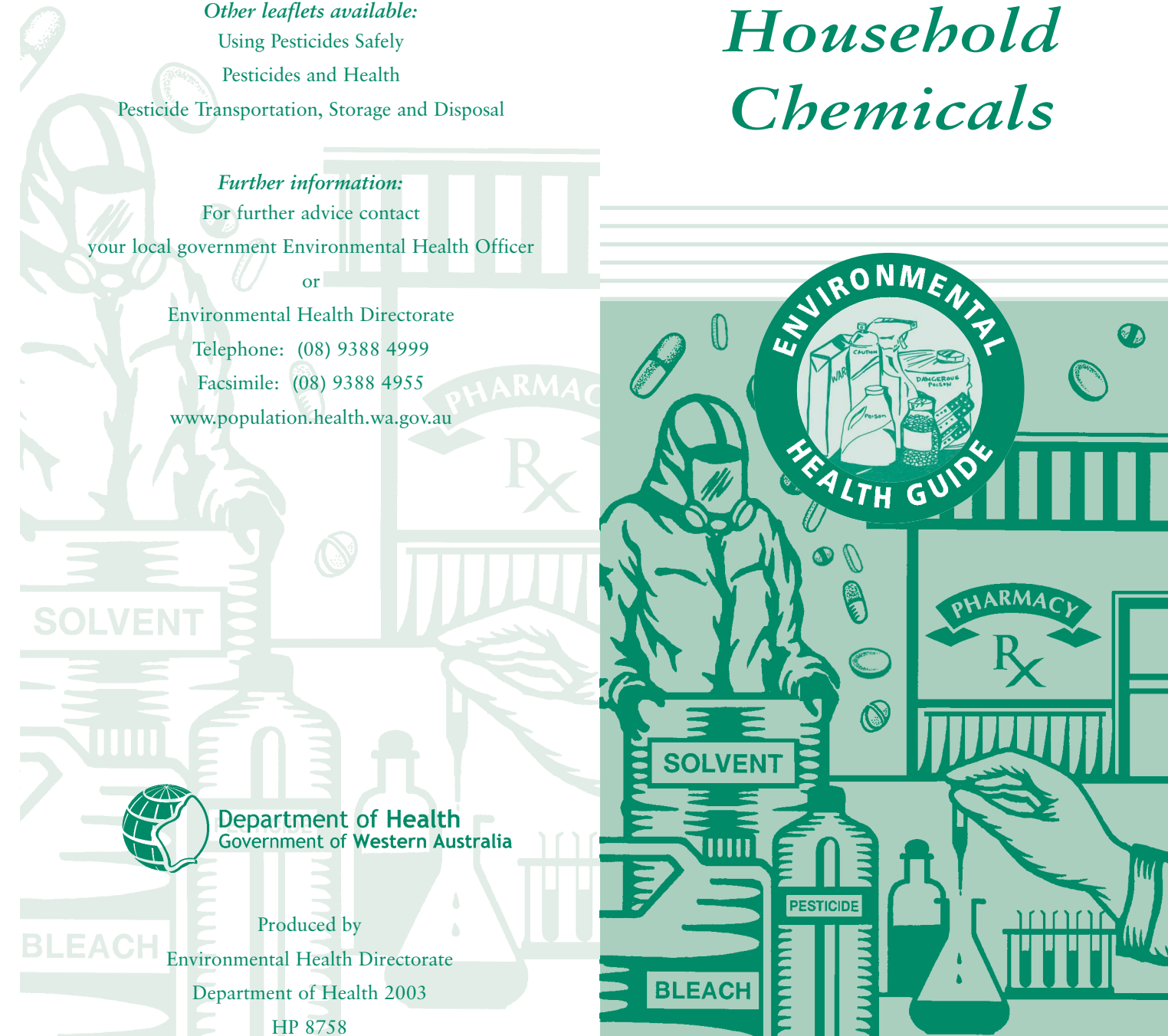
www.population.health.wa.gov.au



Department of Health
Government of Western Australia

Produced by
Environmental Health Directorate
Department of Health 2003

HP 8758



Safe use of Household Chemicals

Household chemicals are those used within and around the house and garden and include medicines - for both animals and humans.

Some household chemicals are dangerous such as oven and drain cleaners, which are all highly corrosive, and rat baits, which are highly poisonous. However, if the label is read carefully and the directions followed exactly they can be used safely.

If you do not understand the information on the label, ask the retailer or someone who knows about chemicals, such as your pharmacist or the health section of your local government office.

All chemicals must be used with care.

Medicines

Human and veterinary medicines are the most potent household chemicals as only a very small amount is required to produce an effect, which may vary greatly.

All medicines have the potential to be dangerous whether they are purchased over-the-counter or obtained by prescription.

Some medicines perceived safe for adults such as iron are highly poisonous to children. For example liquid paracetamol is a common cause of poisoning in children. Products can also be dangerous to adults when taken in larger quantities than prescribed.

Older people often become more sensitive to medicines and should be very careful when taking them. Also, they may have a variety of medicines at home and a conscious effort to avoid access by visiting children is recommended.

How can I use medicines safely?

DO:

- ✓ Do Read the label before taking the medicine. If your eyesight is failing, have someone read the label for you.
- ✓ Do Follow all directions carefully - those given you by the doctor or pharmacist as well as those on the label of the container or packet.
- ✓ Do Take only the recommended dose.
- ✓ Do Complete the course of medication if advised by your doctor. For over-the-counter drugs seek the advice of your pharmacist or follow the instructions on the label.

- ✓ Do Keep all medicines out of reach of children, preferably under lock and key.
- ✓ Do Take any unwanted medicines to your local pharmacy for disposal.

DO NOT

- ✗ Do not Swap medicines, particularly prescription drugs. Only the person whose name is on the label should take them.
- ✗ Do not Use medicines after their expiry date.

Disposal of medicines

Expired, unused or unwanted medicines should be taken to your local pharmacy for disposal.

Other household chemicals

Children, particularly preschoolers, have the highest incidence of poisonings and household chemical accidents. They are much more likely to swallow chemicals, even those with a very unpleasant taste such as mineral turpentine or caustic soda.

Labelling of chemicals

All the information you need to know about the dangers and safe use of chemicals is found on the label.

The level of toxicity is required by law to be included on the label in large letters.

DANGEROUS POISON	indicating high toxicity (not usually found in households but might be found on farms)
POISON	indicating moderate toxicity
CAUTION	indicating low toxicity

Most household chemicals do not require any of these warnings because they are not sufficiently dangerous. However, the manufacturer may choose to use the word WARNING on the label.

Apart from the directions for use, the label should include a warning statement, how poisoning might occur, the likely effects and first aid instructions. It will also have the telephone number of the Poisons Information Centre that you should call in case of poisoning 131126.

Safe use of chemicals

The risk of poisoning in the home is very low if a few simple precautions are taken when buying, using, storing and disposing of chemicals.

Buying Chemicals

- ✓ Prior to purchase, find out about the product through your local nursery, hardware store or retailer.
- ✓ Choose the least dangerous product if there is more than one available for the job (use the warnings on the label as a guide).
- ✓ Buy only as much as you require to complete the job. Apart from being economical, the problem of storing or disposing of leftover, unwanted material is avoided.

Using Chemicals

- ✓ Be prepared - Read and be familiar with the directions on the label before using a chemical.
- ✓ Note the Safety Directions and follow them carefully during use e.g. avoid breathing in vapours when spraying a pesticide or when applying a sealant, prevent skin and eye contact when handling corrosive chemicals such as spirits or hydrochloric acid by wearing rubber gloves and eye goggles.
- ✓ Make sure you have the materials listed under Safety Directions and First Aid Instructions handy in case of an emergency.
- ✓ Pay particular attention to the Directions For Use. Use exactly as stated on the label; twice as much will not be twice as effective, but may be twice as toxic as using less may require more frequent applications and increase the danger of poisoning.
- ✓ Keep children and pets away when using chemicals, particularly those labelled CAUTION and POISON.
- ✗ Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling chemicals and always wash your hands afterwards with soap and water.
- ✗ Do not mix chemicals or products unless specified on the label.
- ✗ When mixing strong acids or alkalis (e.g. solid caustic soda) add the chemical to cold water. NEVER add water to a chemical. Do not use hot water as there is a risk of explosion.
- ✗ Do not become complacent using chemicals. Take care even when there are no warnings or Safety

Directions on the label; the product may still be hazardous, particularly to children, if swallowed, sprayed in the eyes or splashed on the skin.

- ✓ Read the instructions each time before using a product; this may save valuable time if first aid is required. Do not rely on your memory.
- ✓ Dispose of a product if the label has been damaged, destroyed, removed or cannot be read.

Storing Chemicals

- ✓ Keep chemicals in original containers.
- ✓ Make sure the container is closed tightly to prevent spillage.
- ✓ Store chemicals tidily for easy identification.
- ✓ Store chemicals out of reach of children - locked up or on a high shelf.
- ✓ Follow any special instructions for storage e.g. flammable liquids should be stored away from a source of heat, acids away from alkalis, medicines and pesticides in a cool place.
- ✓ Routinely check that the containers are not damaged or leaking if storing chemicals for any extended period.
- ✗ Never store pool chemicals near fuels of any kind.
- ✗ Do not pour or store chemicals into unlabelled containers, containers in which food or drinks would be stored normally or those that may be attractive to children.



In this guide, these products will be divided broadly under the headings Medicines and Other Household Chemicals.