



# Resident Reporter

## Household hazardous waste

■ Keeping hazardous wastes in the household is a cause for concern to many residents. In this issue's *Resident Reporter*, hazardous waste disposal, rules and regulations will be discussed and addressed.

As of February 2006, it is unlawful for any person to place "universal wastes" in the trash. Universal Wastes are items, such as batteries, florescent light bulbs, mercury thermostats, TVs, cell phones, and VCRs. These are all common items that are found in all homes across the nation. And, these items are now considered hazardous waste, like used motor oil and paint and must be disposed of in an authorized hazardous waste disposal facility.

### To trash or not to trash

The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) have conducted numerous testing of household items to see if they have levels high enough to be considered hazardous waste. If items contain concentration of metals (lead and copper), it's hazardous waste and needs to be disposed of at a proper facility. Some of the items tested that are considered too hazardous to trash in your toter, include: tube and flat panel televisions and computer monitors, laptop computers, CPU computers, printers, radios, microwaves, VCRs, cell phones, cordless phones, and answering machines. And, according to DTSC, unless you are sure any particular item is not hazardous, presume



it is and recycle or dispose properly. Not sure if it's hazardous waste, contact the Waste Evaluation Help Line at 916.322.7676.

### If I can't toss it, how can I get rid of it?

Many local government agencies run programs that help households and small businesses recycle or properly dispose of their hazardous wastes. Some retailers will collect waste, such as batteries. For a provider in your area, visit <http://www.earth911.org>.

### Compliance and enforcement

It is illegal to dispose of household hazardous wastes in the garbage. And, it can bring additional hazards to the garbage handler if hazardous items are tossed. Eventually, chemicals in illegally disposed hazardous waste can be released into the environment and contaminate our air, water and possible the food we eat.

There is not a "phase-in" period for disposal of hazardous waste; the exemption expired in February 2006. The California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) and the DTSC, local enforcement agencies (LEAs) and certified unified program agencies (CUPAs) take into account the need for a transition

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period for owners and operators to implement any new requirements. The LEAs and CUPAs continue to prioritize enforcement violations that present immediate risks to the public or environment.

There are many questions like, “What if I throw away my portable CD player in the trash? Will I be cited with a violation?” Regulations do not provide for an acceptable amount of universal waste that can be commingled with non-hazardous solid wastes. Often, hazardous wastes are commingled together (like the CD player, along with oil and paint). If your garbage handler finds hazardous wastes in your trashcan, they may refuse to accept the load contaminated with universal wastes. Your best bet would be to take all universal hazardous waste to your local hazardous waste disposal site.

### Resources

**Department of Toxic Substances Control. Universal Waste FAQ.** <http://dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/UniversalWaste/index.cfm>.

**California Apartment Association. Issue Insights. February 2006.** <http://www.caanet.org>

### What Materials Are Hazardous?

Material	Description
Common Batteries	AA, C & D cells, hearing aid batteries—may contain a corrosive chemical (may cause burns) and heavy metals like cadmium.
Fluorescent, high density discharge, metal halide, sodium, neon bulbs	Contains mercury vapor that may be released to the environment when broken.
Thermostats	Contains mercury inside sealed glass “tilt switch” of the old style thermostats.
Electronic Devices	TVs, CPU monitors, computers, printers, VCRs, cell phones, telephones, radios and microwaves—often contain heavy metals like lead, cadmium, copper and chromium.
Electrical Switches & Relays	Typically contain mercury in the switches in some chest freezers, pre-1972 washing machines, sump pumps, electric space heaters, clothes irons, silent light switches, automobile hood and trunk lights and ABS brakes.
Pilot Light Sensors	Mercury-containing switches found in some gas appliances: stoves, ovens, clothes dryers, water heaters, furnaces and space heaters.
Mercury Gauges	Barometers, manometers, blood pressure and vacuum gauges.
Mercury Added Novelties	Greeting cards that play music, pre-1997 athletic shoes with flashing lights in soles and mercury maze games.
Mercury Thermometers	Typically contain a half gram of mercury.

Courtesy of California Apartment Association. [www.caanet.org](http://www.caanet.org)