

# ***Hazardous Materials In The Home***

The term "hazardous materials" is most often associated with things like chemical dumps, trains and trucks hauling dangerous cargo and leaks of substances that force large scale evacuations. But think about what you are keeping in your cupboards, medicine cabinets, garages and basements and you'll find your home is literally a warehouse full of hazardous materials. From hair spray to bleach to household cleansers, it is essential to know the dangers posed by improper use and storage of hazardous products and treat them with caution. Generally, hazardous materials are placed in four groups. Many fall under more than one category. The following symbols are often included on consumer products that are potentially harmful.

## **Classification of Hazardous Materials**



Flammable



Explosive



Corrosive



Poisonous

### **Flammable**

- Anything that poses a threat of fire during routine use is considered to be a flammable substance.
- Aerosol cans are among the most common items that can be lethal if used near a heat source or open flame. They should be kept away from children and stored far away from stoves, furnaces and hot water heaters.
- Proper storage of fuels such as gasoline and kerosene is critical. They must be kept in containers designed specifically to hold them to prevent dangerous spills or vapours from igniting. If possible, they should be stored outside the home in a shed or garage that can be locked to prevent children from accessing them.
- Whenever you use products that are flammable or give off flammable vapours, make sure you are in a well ventilated area with easy access to an exit.
- Be careful about storage or use of cloths or rags used to apply flammable liquids such as polishes, spot removers and alcohol-based products. Never put saturated items in a clothes dryer. It could be hot enough to ignite them.

### **Explosive**

- The most common explosives found in households are propellants or fuels that are kept in pressurized containers. This includes aerosol cans, propane tanks and butane fillers for cigarette lighters.
- Certain substances that are safe when used alone can be extremely dangerous if mixed together. The chemical reaction of vinegar coupled with baking soda in a sealed container is a common example.
- Never dispose of potentially explosive materials into apartment building incinerators.
- If you detect the smell of natural gas in your home, or if you suspect there's a gas leak, leave the building and call the gas company immediately.

### **Corrosive**

- Many household cleaning items such as oven and drain cleaners are hazardous to the skin and eyes and also to the environment. Read the labeling carefully. If the instructions call for rubber gloves, wear them.
- Some corrosives can give off harmful vapours, especially if they're mixed together. Many scrubbing and dishwashing detergents contain chlorine bleach and produce a toxic gas if put in contact with ammonia, lye or acids.
- A corrosive can eat away an improper container. Styrofoam cups and some plastics are not appropriate for storage of paint thinners or other corrosives.

## Poisonous

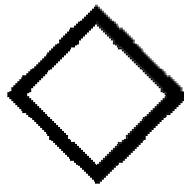
- The "Skull and Crossbones" signifies toxic materials that can release poisons in sufficient quantities to harm a person.
- Toxicity means the substance can enter the body by ingestion or eating, through the skin, or into the lungs. Over time or all at once, there can be a concentration of the toxin in the body.
- The material can even be beneficial, as is the case with drugs or medicine, but excessive amounts can cause injury or death.
- Again, reading the label or instructions that come with the product is essential. Remember that combining one substance with another can create a dangerous chemical reaction.

## Degree of Danger

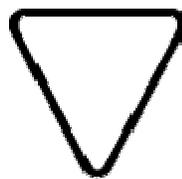
Combined with the 3 symbols below, the classification images show the type and extent to which a substance can be harmful.



Danger



Warning



Caution

## More About Product Labels

- Make sure that you read all the information.
- The label may tell you about precautions to take when using the product.
- It may outline the most common types of injuries that might result from improper use.
- A list of the active ingredients can help a health care provider or Poison Information Centre to treat the injury.
- Often, the label will provide proper ways to store and dispose of the product.

## What to do in the Event of Injury

- Call **911** if the person is having trouble breathing or shows obvious signs of distress.
- Try to keep the person calm and in close sight.
- If the injury is due to ingestion of a poisonous product, call your local Poison Information Centre.

