

Household Chemical Safety

You probably use many household chemical products in and around your home and garage. These products may include cleaning liquids and powders, polishes, drain cleaners, paint thinners, and windshield washer fluids. These types of products can be dangerous and cause burns, fires, poisonings and explosions.

Did you know?

Laundry detergent packs are attractive to children and can be dangerous if ingested. Keep them locked out of sight and reach of children.

Household chemical products are among the top products responsible for injuries and deaths in children under the age of five years. Bad taste and odours often do not keep children away from household chemical products. Even a small amount of a chemical product can be harmful to a child.

Use, store, and dispose of household chemicals carefully. Learn the meaning of the hazard symbols and follow all directions on the label.

Important!

If someone has been in contact with a household chemical product and you think they may have been harmed:

- Call a [Poison Control Centre](#) or your health care provider right away. You can find phone numbers for the Poison Control Centre nearest you at the front of your local telephone book or by searching *Poison Control Centre + (your province or territory)* on the Internet.
- Tell the person who answers the phone what the product label says. There should also be first aid instructions on the back or side of the product surrounded by a border.
- Bring the product with you when you go for help.

Safety tips

1. **Read the label before you buy or use a household chemical product.**
 - Follow the instructions every time you use a household chemical. By law, the label must include instructions on how to use and store the product safely. It must also show warnings of potential hazards.
 - By law, household chemical products must have a bordered label on the back or side. Inside the border, you will find instructions for safe use and first aid treatment, and a list of harmful substances in the product.
 - Look for [hazard symbols on the front of the product](#). If you don't already know what these symbols mean, learn them. If you follow the instructions, you could prevent an injury. You could even save a life.
 - Do not cover up or remove the labels from household chemical products.
2. **Use household chemical products carefully, especially around children.**
 - Never mix household chemical products together. Some mixtures can produce harmful gases.
 - Check that child-resistant closures are in good working order.
 - Child-resistant does not mean child-proof. Close the cap on the container all the way even if you set it down for just a moment.
 - Teach children that [hazard symbols](#) mean **Danger! Do not touch**.
 - Post emergency phone numbers by your telephone and/or program the number into your phone.
3. **Store household chemical products safely.**
 - Store all household chemical products in their original containers. Keep all safety information.
 - Keep all household chemical products locked away, where children cannot **see** or **reach** them.
 - Try not to store products that may release harmful fumes or catch fire inside your home. These items include paints, solvents, gasoline, fuels or varnishes. Store them according to the instructions on the product's label in a separate building if you can, or in an area that is well vented to the outside.
4. **Dispose of leftover household chemical products safely.**
 - Buy only the amount you need for the job so there is no waste.
 - Check your city or town's guidelines for instructions on how to dispose of chemicals and other hazardous waste.
 - **Never:**
 - burn household chemical containers
 - pour the contents down the drain unless directed
 - inappropriately re-use empty containers

Choosing to use a pesticide? Follow the above guidelines for the safe use, storage and disposal of household chemical products. Buy only as much pesticide as you need. Make sure that it is a product registered by Health Canada, by finding the PCP (Pest Control Product) number on the label. See also: [Homeowner Guidelines for Using Pesticides](#).

Understanding hazard symbols

Hazard symbols are on the labels of many products in and around your home and garage, like cooking spray, cleaning products, paint thinners, drain cleaners and windshield washer fluid.

Hazard symbols have three parts:

1. [the picture](#)
2. [the frame](#)
3. [the caution \(signal\) words underneath the image](#)

1. Hazard symbol pictures

The **picture** tells you the **type of danger**:



- **EXPLOSIVE**
The container can explode if heated or punctured. Flying pieces of metal or plastic from the container can cause serious injury, especially to your eyes.



- **CORROSIVE**
The product can burn your skin or eyes. If swallowed, it can damage your throat and stomach.



- **FLAMMABLE**
The product or its fumes will catch fire easily if it is near heat, flames, or sparks. Rags used with this product may begin to burn on their own.



- **POISON**
If you swallow, lick, or in some cases, breathe in the chemical, you could become very sick or die.

2. Hazard symbol frames

The **shape of the frame** around the hazard symbol tells you **what part of the product is dangerous**:



- If it's a **triangle**, it means the **container** is dangerous.



- If it's an **octagon**, it means the **contents** are dangerous.

3. Signal words

The **signal word(s)** underneath the hazard symbol explain the **degree of risk**:



Symbol -

Signal word - **DANGER EXPLOSIVE**

Signal words:

- **CAUTION** means temporary injury may result. Death may occur with extreme exposure.
- **DANGER** means may cause temporary or permanent injury, or death.
- **EXTREME DANGER** means exposure to very low amounts may cause death or serious injury.

Check for [product recalls](#) and [report any injuries or other product-related health and safety concerns](#).