



Reducing Paint Waste For Homeowners

"What should I do with my leftover paint?" is a common question. The Environmental Protection Agency recently estimated that 10-15 percent of the house paint bought in the United States each year – some 69 million gallons – is ultimately discarded.^{1,2} "That's enough paint to cover ...--some 303 square miles [of buildings]--more than three times."²

The [Product Stewardship Institute](#) has been working with state and local governments, manufacturers, retailers, paint recyclers, paint contractors, and environmental/consumer advocates to develop leftover paint management solutions that are both financially and environmentally sustainable. A [Green Seal standard for recycled paint](#) was developed as part of this effort. In January 2008, the State of Minnesota will begin a paint recycling demonstration project. The program is expected to be rolled out nationally in 2009. Until then below are steps that can be taken to minimize or recycle paint.

Some of the following ideas on reuse could apply to any type of paint. There are two different types of paint, latex and oil based. Latex is cleaned up with water and is sensitive to being frozen in the winter. Many times this will 'break' the emulsion and the product becomes unusable. One way to tell the type of paint is by reading the label clean-up instructions. If the label says you must use mineral spirits or turpentine to clean your brush or roller, then the product is typically solvent-based. If you can clean your brush or roller with soap and water, it is typically latex, or water-based, paint. Oil based paint contains solvents that are not freeze sensitive but emit toxic and flammable fumes.

Air Health Issues

Fumes are also called VOCs or volatile organic compounds. Water-based (latex) paints can contain 5 to 10 percent VOCs, while oil- or solvent-based paints contain 40 to 60 percent VOCs. These are the source of the 'new paint' smell that can cause respiratory problems in some people. GreenSeal has created standards for low-VOC paints that are more stringent than EPA's: a maximum VOC level of 50 g/L for flat paints and 150 g/L for non-flat paints. If the VOC level is not displayed on a product's label, ask for a material safety data sheet. For more information visit:

EPA, Renovating & indoor air quality www.epa.gov/iaq/homes/hip-concerns.html ; and
Green Seal wood finishes www.greenseal.org/resources/reports/CGR_wood_finish.pdf

Reducing Leftover Paint

Purchase small 'test' quantities

Many stores now have 'paint sample' containers that allow you to take home a small amount to determine whether it is the shade you want.

Purchase only what is needed

Calculators are available on the Internet and in many retail stores to help you determine how much paint you need. The amount will vary depending up the quality/thickness/type of the paint but calculators provide good estimates.

Benjamin Moore www.benjaminmoore.ca/howto/paint_calculator.aspx

Rohm Hass www.paintquality.com/diy/calculator/calc.html

Behr www.behr.com/behrex/act/process/form/calc-page/int

HGTV <http://web.hgtv.com/hgtv/web/calculator/1,,1,00.html>

Reusing Leftover Paint

Store Paint for repairs

Keep partial cans of paint left from jobs for repairs and touch ups. Use a permanent marker to label the can "07Living room wall paint", etc. If you used all the paint or don't want to store any left, keeping a spot of the paint on the lid will provide a sample to match to later if more is needed. Avoid keeping more than five cans to prevent having a large volume to dispose of eventually. If stored indoors, paint can be kept for 4 years or more but must be properly sealed. Be certain to keep the paint in the original container and label to provide the drying time, type of paint (flat? interior?), etc. The National Paint and Coatings Association recommends placing plastic wrap under the lid to help seal the can. Note: Paint is expected to have some separation of fluids over time. If it can be mixed smoothly, it's usable. If the paint has rubbery lumps, the paint was likely frozen and should be solidified and discarded.

Mix and Reuse

Left-over paint can be stored and reused with some exceptions. Paint older than 1992 should not be used or donated as it may contain lead or mercury. Paint in cans with rust or mold when opened should not be used. The vast majority of paint in storage is likely newer than 1992 and in good shape. With these partial cans of paint, consider using left over paint as a primer for another job. Buying a quart of white to mix with a half gallon of color could be an alternative to buying a full gallon for a small room or closet and saves money. In general, mix the same type of paint, i.e., gloss with gloss, flat with flat, interior with interior, primer with primer, etc. Mixes of questionable colors can be used in an area that is not aesthetically significant, such as basement, closet, garage, pole barn, etc, or over a bright color but never as a primer. (For a discussion on how primer is different from paint, visit: www.taunton.com/finehomebuilding/how-to/articles/do-not-skip-primer.aspx?nterms=66104Paint)

Building Material Restores

Many building material restores, like the Habitat for Humanity, will accept leftover cans of paint, both latex and oil based. Some require the cans to be un-opened while others accept half gallons of opened paint that is clearly labeled. Contact your area restore to determine what they accept.

www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-ess-p2-green-cw-matls-restores_206540_7

Community Collections & Projects

Consider giving the paint to a community cleanup project for painting over graffiti, community improvement projects, theatre set projects, schools, vocational classes, etc. Be sure that interior paint is not being used for exterior applications.

Some communities may hold a paint collection event. Many communities hold Household Hazardous Waste collections once or twice a year that generally accept oil based paint and solvents, thinners, strippers or any item which contains the warning label "combustible".

www.michigan.gov/deqreswastecontacts Latex paint is rarely accepted by an HHW or other recycling centers but there are exceptions. Contact your area recycling contact to determine what the local resources include.

Paint Disposal

If you can't save, use up, donate, exchange or recycle leftover paint, as a last resort, you need to properly dispose of your leftover paint. Liquids are banned from landfills.

- Air dry small quantities of leftover latex-based paint and discard it in your trash. Make sure you do this away from children and pets. One method is to pour the latex paint onto a sheet of plastic or on newspapers and let it dry. Then you can roll it up and toss it out with your regular trash.
- Latex paints can also be mixed with kitty litter or commercial product to solidify them and place them into the trash.
- Liquid solvent-based paint should not be discarded with the normal trash. They could pose a hazard to the hauler or the landfill. Instead, save it for a special paint collection or a household hazardous waste program in your community.
- Air drying liquid solvent-based paint is not recommended. This can release toxic and combustible fumes.
- If paint has already solidified in a can, you can dispose of it in your regular trash. Empty paint cans may be recycled but if not, make sure the lid is off so the trash disposal crew can open the bag and determine there are no liquids.

Dry and hardened paint, paint cans, brushes, etc, can be placed into household trash.

Except for latex (water based) paint brush cleaning, NEVER pour paint (latex or oil) down a sewer, sink or toilet connection. This can cause environmental damage in storm drains, can plug or add toxic vapors to septic systems and sanitary drains, and pollute local surface and ground water which may supply your drinking water.

Resources:

1 Quantifying the Disposal of Post-Consumer Paint, 2004 written for EPA by Abt Associates Inc.
www.productstewardship.us/associations/6596/files/Abt.doc

2 Consumer Reports www.consumerreports.org/cro/home-garden/resource-center/easy-ways-to-properly-dispose-of-leftover-paint-8-07/overview/0708_ways_to_dispose_of_leftover_paint.htm

**Paint Pollution Prevention
(P2) Resources**

EPA states that leftover paint is the largest volume item collected by community household hazardous waste collection programs and represents a high cost for local governments. Yet, leftover paint offers significant potential for reuse and recycling.

STATE RESOURCES

State Websites

Green Construction & Demolition	www.michigan.gov/deqconstruction
Lead Poisoning	www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,1607,7-132-2940_2955_2983---,00.html
Open Burning	www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3310_4148-65250--,00.html
Recycling	www.michigan.gov/deqrecycling
Recycled Materials Market Directory	www.michigan.gov/deqrmmd
Small Business P2 Loans	www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3307_3515_4144---,00.html

FEDERAL RESOURCES

Federal Documents

Lead –Consumer product safety	www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/5054.html
Lead -Remodeling hazards -EPA	www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/rrpamph.pdf
Lead website -EPA	www.epa.gov/lead
Quantifying the Disposal of Post-Consumer Paint, 2004	www.productstewardship.us/associations/6596/files/Abt.doc

Federal Websites

Lead Paint & Remanufacturing	www.fpl.fs.fed.us/documnts/fplqtr/fpl_qtr164.pdf
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ONLINE EXCHANGES/ COMPANY LISTS

Build Recycle	build.recycle.net
Building Material Reuse Assoc	www.buildingreuse.org/directory/michigan

OTHER RESOURCES

Other Documents

Recycled Paint Standard –Green Seal	www.greenseal.org/findaproduct/index.cfm#paints
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Other Websites

Environmental & Healthy paints -Green Seal	www.greenseal.org/findaproduct/index.cfm#paints
Michigan Recycling Coalition	www.michiganrecycles.org
National Paint & Coatings Association	www.paint.org/con_info/leftover.cfm
Paint Quality Institute -DIY	www.paintquality.com/diy/index.html
Product Stewardship Institute Resources	http://www.productstewardship.us/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=141
	http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/756fc9115d0af011852572a00065593e/5da00bb050bc2fe3852572c800627179!OpenDocument