Watch storing, disposal of household chemicals

Many commonly used household products — automotive oil, household cleaners, solvents, paints, lawn and garden chemicals — are potentially hazardous if used, stored, handled or disposed of improperly.

If thrown out with household trash, these materials will eventually form a leachate or leak out of the landfill contributing to the underlying groundwater contamination. 17 percent of all known groundwater contamination in Michigan is the result of landfill leachate.

Not all commercially available cleaning agents are toxic, but determining whether a household product is hazardous can be difficult. Manufacturers are not required to list ingredients of their products and in many cases health effects of products are not fully known because they have not been adequately tested.

Federal regulations state the toxicity of a product must be indicated by one of the following words:

CAUTION: Suggests that the product should be used with care.

WARNING: Implies the presence of a stronger hazard than with caution. Use additional care.

DANGER: Signals that exposure or unsafe use may cause injury, illness, or death.

Other key words that indicate a toxic substance are poison, flammable, volatile, caustic and corrosive. Many labels are misleading because federal rules regulating labeling are vague.

While small household sources of hazardous substances are not regulated the same way as industrial substances, the combined effect of individual household sources becomes considerable.

Many non-hazardous alternatives for these hazardous products exist and can be used safely to achieve the same results. Some of these cleaners are baking soda, white vinegar, salt and lemon juice. Try some of these solutions in your home:

- **Bathtub, sink toilet bowl cleaners**

A paste of baking soda and water cleans bathtubs and sinks without being abrasive.

For mildew in tile grout or on shower curtains, use white vinegar or lemon juice. Commercial products labeled "non-chlorine" are less toxic than other brands.

- **Drain openers**

Pour a handful of baking soda down the drain followed by one-half cup of white vinegar. Cover the drain tightly for one minute, then rinse with boiling water. Or, use one-half cup salt and one-half cup baking soda, followed by lots of hot water.

- **Oven cleaners**

Scrub with baking soda, or soak with a mixture of baking soda and water.

- **Window and glass cleaners**

Use a mixture of one tablespoon vinegar in one quart water.

- **Furniture polish**

Use mineral oil, mayonnaise, or two parts olive or vegetable oil and one part lemon juice.

- **Laundry soap**

Non-detergent, commercial laundry soap is one of the mildest cleaning agents in terms of skin irritability and toxicity. When adding soap flakes to warm or cold water, first dissolve the soap in hot water, then add to the washer. For freshening or odor removal, add one cup vinegar or baking soda instead of soap. It will remove smells without adding any odors.

The Consumer Mailbag answers your questions. Address mail to the Consumer Mailbag, Concern Detroit One Kennedy Square, 4th Floor, Detroit, MI 48226.

consumer mailbag

Japanese donate to area schools

The Japanese Society of Detroit recently made donations to nine Oakland County school districts which Japanese students attend.

Districts receiving this gift include: Bloomfield Hills Schools, Novi Community School District, Walled Lake Consolidated Schools, Troy School District, Birmingham Public Schools, Southfield Public Schools, Farmington Public Schools, Rochester Community Schools and the West Bloomfield School District.

JSD also donated to the Imlay City School Districts in Lapeer County.

"It is indeed an honor to represent the members of the JSD in recognizing the schools of this community for the kindness and generosity exhibited toward our Japanese students," said Keitaro Yokohata, society chairman, to superintendents representing those districts.

Founded in 1972, the Japanese Society of Detroit is made up of 1,264 members from more than 216 companies mostly related to Detroit's automotive industry and trading. The society surveys the distribution of Japanese students in the Greater Detroit area and selects the school districts which Japanese students attend for funding.

JSD's annual donations to various Detroit area school districts amount to more than $20,000 — allowing the schools to use the money for any purpose they deem appropriate.

1990 marks the third year that JSD has made these donations to Oakland County school districts.

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