

# Disposing of Leftover Latex Paint

## CHARLEVOIX COUNTY RECYCLING PROGRAM



There are two types of paints commonly sold for home use: water-based latex paints and oil-based paints. Oil-based paints, (as well as wood finishes, shellacs, varnishes, wood protectors, mildew resistant paints, and “preservative” paints) must all be brought to a household hazardous waste drop-off day to be properly disposed of.

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LATEX PAINT OVER 20 YEARS OLD MAY CONTAIN LEAD & MUST ALSO BE BROUGHT IN ON A HHHW DROP-OFF DAY.

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This flyer is about latex paints under 20 years old. Modern latex paint is easier to get rid of than any other kind of paint or finish.

**Deciding if it is latex paint.** First try looking for “latex” on the label. If the label is missing or covered with paint, you may be able to tell which kind of paint you have, based on how it was thinned or cleaned up. If water will rinse fresh paint off hands and brushes the paint is a latex. If paint thinner, mineral spirits, or a special brush cleaner must be used to clean up, then the paint is oil-based. So, if you remember using the paint and that you didn’t have to use paint thinner, turpentine, mineral spirits, or other solvents (other than water) to clean up, then it is latex.

If you really can’t figure out if it is, or isn’t latex, assume it is oil-based and bring it to the next HHHW Drop-off Day.

**The best way to handle extra paint** is not to buy too much. Most paints list how many square feet they will cover on the label. Measure the area you plan to paint (multiply the length of the wall in feet by its height in feet to calculate square feet) and ask the clerk in the paint department for help in buying only the amount you need. This way you avoid waste, and save money.

Next, use up the paint you buy. If there’s just a little bit left, apply another coat somewhere to use it up. Or, use it for touch-ups later.



If you plan to use paint for future touch-ups, be sure to store it in a heated building (freezing ruins latex paint). If the paint is watery, or the clear & colored portions keep separating when you try to mix them, then your paint is not usable.

**Disposing of latex paint.** Latex paint is less toxic than oil-based paint, but it still has poisonous chemicals in it. Since latex paint is often over 1/2 water, it can easily soak into soil or spread through water in the environment. If it isn’t dried out before it’s thrown out, it can seep into our lakes and wells.

Also, while it’s okay to rinse brushes and rollers, and clean up your hands at a sink after painting with a latex, **do not pour paint** into drains connected to septic tanks, municipal sewage systems, or storm drains.

**How much is still in the can?** How to handle your old paint depends on how much is in the can. If the can has just a thin film (less than 1/32 of an inch) on the sides, you can simply throw out the can. If it is a metal can, you can even recycle it. If there is just an inch or so of paint in the can, simply pop the lid open a crack and leave the open can in a well ventilated area (where children & animals won’t get to it). Within a few weeks, the paint will dry out and harden. Then you can put the whole can out with your regular garbage. **When you put latex paint out with your trash, put the can where the garbage hauler can see it & leave the lid off so they can see that the paint has hardened. Haulers can not pick up paint unless they know it is thoroughly dried latex paint.**



Liquid paint is not picked up because it would run out of the can when the garbage is compacted, and/or may leach out of a landfill and pollute neighboring wells.

**If there is more than a little paint in the can**, a pint or more of paint can take a long time to dry. Below are a couple of suggestions to speed up the process:

- Line a box with a plastic bag and pour a thin layer of paint (less than 1" thick) into the box. Store the box in a well ventilated place, where children and animals won't get into it. When the first layer has hardened, pour in another layer. When you've dried out all of the paint, put the box out with your regular trash.
- Either in the can (if there's room) or in a plastic-lined box, mix the paint with an equal amount of cat box filler (kitty litter) or oil dry. You will still need to store it until it is fully hardened.

#### **What you'll need:**

- Newspaper, drop-cloths, or plastic sheeting to protect the area where you plan to work
- Screw driver and/or other tools to open the cans
- Scoopable kitty litter
- Stir sticks
- Coffee cans, ice cream buckets, or similar containers with lids (if your paint cans are over 2/3 full)
- Paper towels or rags for clean up

#### **What to do:**

1. Open up can. If more than 2/3 full, pour some of it into a coffee can, ice cream bucket, or similar container.
2. Put in some kitty litter and stir it up. Start with a cup or two of kitty litter. How much you need will depend on the nature and condition of the paint.
3. When your paint has hardened you can put it and the metal can out with your trash.
4. Put the can (with the lid off) where the garbage hauler can see the paint has hardened.



## CHARLEVOIX COUNTY RECYCLING PROGRAM



**Recycling is the smart thing to do!**

### REMEMBER

LATEX PAINT OVER 20 YEARS OLD MAY CONTAIN LEAD & MUST BE BROUGHT IN ON A HHHW DROP-OFF DAY.

DO NOT POUR PAINT DOWN ANY KIND OF DRAIN (STORM DRAIN, SEPTIC SYSTEM) OR PUT LIQUID PAINT IN THE REGULAR TRASH.

WHEN DRYING OUT LATEX PAINTS, STORE THEM IN A WELL VENTILATED AREA WHERE CHILDREN & ANIMALS CAN'T GET INTO THEM.

IF A LATEX PAINT LABEL SAYS IT IS MILDEW RESISTANT OR PRESERVATIVE, IT MUST BE BROUGHT IN ON A HHHW DROP-OFF DAY.

WHEN PUTTING LATEX PAINT OUT WITH YOUR TRASH, PUT THE CAN WHERE THE GARBAGE HAULER CAN SEE IT AND LEAVE THE LID OFF SO THEY CAN SEE THE PAINT HAS HARDENED. HAULERS CAN NOT PICK UP PAINT UNLESS THEY KNOW IT IS THOROUGHLY DRIED.

CONTACT THE CHARLEVOIX  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT AT  
(231) 582-6193 FOR  
HHHW DROP-OFF DAY INFORMATION

Michele Hewitt, Chairperson  
(231) 582-0335  
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[www.charlevoixcounty.org/recycling.asp](http://www.charlevoixcounty.org/recycling.asp)