

Keeping Wastes Out of Drains and Toilets Prevents Pollution

According to a brochure distributed by the Water Environment Federation (WEF), 'Household Hazardous Waste: What You Should and Shouldn't Do', the average home contains three to ten gallons of materials that are hazardous to human health or the natural environment.

So what do you do with that half-empty can of paint left over from last summer's renovation project? That outdated insecticide? Or the used motor oil?

Don't pour them down the drain. Like storm drains, household drains are not intended to be used as garbage cans. Dumping hazardous chemicals down the drain or toilet may get them temporarily out of sight, but like Arnold Schwarzenegger's character in the movie 'The Terminator': "They'll be back".

If you have a septic tank, for example, excessively large quantities of the chemicals, especially if they're poured down the drain all at once, can destroy the bacteria that break down the waste. This can interfere with the septic tank's functioning and possibly clog the drain field, causing it to fail.

You may think you're home free if you're tied into a municipal sewer, but that just isn't the case. Automotive fluids, pesticides, solvents, and other substances dumped down the toilet or drain can also cause serious problems once they arrive at the treatment plant.

Just as in the septic tank, substances discarded into home drains can inhibit or destroy the biological processes that break down wastes during secondary treatment. These chemicals can also create unsafe working conditions at the treatment facility as well.

Keep in mind that the effluent's journey doesn't end at the plant or septic tank. Often, it's discharged into local aquifers or waterways, the primary source of drinking water for millions of people. This poses a threat to the aquatic life as well as those who drink the water and use it for recreation.

Toxic metals and other harmful residual materials contained in household waste may also accumulate in the sludge from the septic tank or the treatment plant. If these substances are present in high enough concentrations, they may make the bio-solids unfit for beneficial uses, such as land application or composting.

So, unless you are fond of swimming or drinking those household chemicals, you may want to reconsider how you dispose of them.

With just a little bit of effort, we can reduce the threats from hazardous waste. All Petersburg residents are urged to contact the City offices to obtain available information.