



## Focus on

# Aerosol Can Management

FROM ECOLOGY'S HAZARDOUS WASTE AND TOXICS REDUCTION PROGRAM

This guidance is for aerosol cans used for paints, solvents, and other commonly used products.

Aerosol spray cans are easy to use but their disposal poses special risks to workers and the environment. The contents are under pressure, often toxic, and may be flammable. Because of these risks, you must dispose of the can and their contents properly.

### When is a can empty?

Ecology does not regulate empty aerosol cans as dangerous waste. A can is empty when completely sprayed out and minimal or no product remains in the can. You must not deliberately spray out contents to empty the can. Use the aerosol product for its intended purpose.

### What can I do with non-dangerous waste cans?

Ecology does not consider empty or partially-full cans with non-dangerous contents (for example, aerosol food products) to be dangerous waste. Partially-full cans should not be put in the trash, since they are pressurized and could cause harm if crushed or heated. Ecology recommends recycling empty cans as scrap metal. Check with your metal recycler. Most metal recyclers will take only punctured and drained aerosol cans.

### What can I do with dangerous waste cans?

Two options are available for managing cans with dangerous waste contents:

- 1) Puncture and drain on-site. The drained liquids must be managed as dangerous waste. Ecology recommends recycling punctured cans as scrap metal.
- 2) Send off-site to a permitted treatment, storage and disposal facility. Common waste codes might include ignitable (D001), corrosive (D002), and "U" listed commercial chemical products. If possible, pull off the stem or replace the cap on collected cans.

### Guidelines for puncturing cans

Ecology allows generators to puncture aerosol cans on-site for the purpose of removing and consolidating liquid residues. Puncturing aerosol cans may produce explosive vapors. Any puncturing method that releases gases or liquids directly to the environment is prohibited. Commercial puncturing devices that capture vapors are available and recommended.

After puncturing, the liquid residues must be collected and managed as dangerous waste, if required. If you puncture several types of cans, you need to be sure the contents are compatible. Keeping a log showing the types of chemicals added to the accumulation container will help you determine which waste codes apply.

If the waste is flammable, the fire department may require you to ground the containers to prevent sparking.

## General dangerous waste management requirements

Following these general requirements will minimize risks to human health and the environment. These are items inspectors will look at during an inspection. They apply to most generators.

- Keep containers closed and in secondary containment.
- Label the container with the major risks (ignitable, corrosive, or toxic).
- Label the container “Dangerous Waste” or “Hazardous Waste.”
- Post emergency information near the phone.

## Do aerosol cans count towards my generator status?

Count all dangerous waste aerosol cans generated per month, unless cans are intended to be punctured and drained. If punctured and drained count only the collected liquids, not the intact cans.

## How do I report aerosol cans on my Dangerous Waste Annual Report?

Intact cans or liquids shipped off-site on a Dangerous Waste Manifest should be reported on your Dangerous Waste Annual Report unless you are a small quantity generator. You may have different waste streams that need to be reported. Similar types of **intact** aerosol cans should be reported as a distinct waste stream. Aerosol cans with the same set of waste codes are considered a distinct, separate waste stream. Liquid mixtures collected from puncturing operations are considered one waste stream. For annual reporting information call the Annual Reporting Hot Line at 1-800-874-2022 (within WA state only), or (360)407-6170. You can also e-mail questions to [Turbowaste@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:Turbowaste@ecy.wa.gov).

## Special handling for acutely hazardous waste (AHW) and extremely hazardous waste (EHW)

Cans that contain or contained pesticides, herbicides, or other extremely hazardous products should be sent off-site to a permitted treatment, storage, or disposal facility. You should not puncture them.

Aerosol cans may be considered acutely or extremely hazardous waste if they contained:

- Acutely hazardous waste, such as Discarded Commercial Chemical Products identified as a “P” listed waste.
- Toxic (poisonous) Extremely Hazardous Waste.
- Pesticides with a “Danger” or “Warning” label. These are the most common products that become EHW or AHW.

You must handle aerosol cans that held AHW or EHW as dangerous waste. Keep them separate from other types of aerosol cans. You can only send them to a facility permitted to receive AHW or EHW wastes. Ecology does not recommend that you try to drain these cans. If you do decide to drain them, contact your dangerous waste compliance inspector for special instructions on dealing with these types of cans.