

Use proper containers and manage them correctly.

Why is it important?

The potential hazards of a waste do not go away when it's put into a container. Many chemical leaks and work-related injuries are linked to improper or unsafe container management.

The container management sections of the Dangerous Waste Regulations (Chapter 173-303) spell out the requirements for handling waste containers in a safe and responsible manner.

What is container management?

- Make sure you and your employees know how to open, handle or store each type of waste container so as not to rupture it or cause it to leak.
- Keep all hazardous waste containers closed unless you are adding or removing waste. This will help reduce the evaporation of some of the more volatile wastes (evaporation of hazardous waste is illegal) and minimize the potential for spills. If you need to add waste frequently, you may want to consider using a funnel with a lid.
- Keep incompatible wastes in separate areas of your operation. You can protect them from each other by using a dike, berm, or wall, and by having separate containment systems that collect any spills of the wastes.
- Maintain **at least 30 inches** of space between rows of waste containers and don't let a row get bigger than 2 drums wide.
- Label each waste container with information on the major risk(s) associated with the waste inside (such as "Ignitable" or "Toxic") so that it's clearly visible to employees, emergency response personnel, and the public.

When you transfer a hazardous waste from one container to another, make sure you put a label on the new container and remove the label from the old one (unless you will use it to hold hazardous waste soon after).

Also, make sure that the old container is legally "empty" if not used again. This means the container is drained so that there is less than one inch of waste or less than three percent of the total capacity of the container.

Do your waste containers measure up?

Make sure you consider the inside and outside "environment" of a container before you select and use it. Is the container made of a material that is compatible with the waste you want to put inside? Do you regularly check your waste containers at least once a week for leaks, rust or other defects?

- Use the container that best protects your waste, your workers, and the environment.

An important thing to remember here is that not all containers are alike. Choose a container for accumulating your waste that is made of a compatible material. Use polyethylene drums for corrosive wastes (strong acids and bases) rather than metal containers.

- Store your containers of ignitable and reactive waste (see Checklist Fact Sheet 1) according to the Uniform Fire Code or the code adopted by your local fire district. Call your local fire department or the Department of Ecology for information to help determine which code applies to your business.
- Do not put incompatible wastes in the same container.

You should also avoid putting a hazardous waste in a container that used to hold an incompatible material unless it has been thoroughly washed. Adding a spent acid (e.g. sulfuric acid) to a container that used to hold a spent caustic material (e.g. sodium hydroxide) could result in the production of extreme heat or a violent reaction.

Keep an eye on those containers.

Inspect your container storage areas at least once a week.

- Inspect each container to see that the labels are not obscured, removed or unreadable.
- Look for leaking containers and for deterioration of containers or your containment system.

If you find a container that has severe rusting or is leaking, transfer the waste in the container to a container that is in good condition. Make sure you immediately notify Ecology and appropriate local authorities for all spills entering the environment.