

THE DANGERS OF HOUSEHOLD GARBAGE

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Reducing the hazardous waste in America's landfills starts at home. Millions of households are producing billions of pounds of solid waste. Products used every day in our homes leach hazardous chemicals after entering landfills. There are a number of simple steps that average consumer can take to limit the damage that many of these toxic materials are doing to the environment.

The garbage situation has become a big concern in cities all around the country and not only is this a political issue, but it is also a problem that has caught the attention of the general population. We all realize there is a growing problem but nobody likes to admit that their garbage is contributing to the problem.

Many municipalities have already started a recycling program to deal with the growing mountains of paper, plastic, glass, etc. Although it takes a bit of effort on the part of the public to sort and separate their garbage, people are now beginning to realize that the future of our environment is at stake.

One household product that is causing a problem these days is throwaway batteries. Each year, Americans throw away 84,000 tons of alkaline batteries. These AA, C and D cells that power electronic toys and games, portable audio equipment and a wide range of other gadgets comprise 20% of the household hazardous materials present around the country in America's landfills.

When a battery in one of the products we use fails, we simply run out and buy a replacement. The dead battery ends up in the garbage and no one thinks about where it goes and what happens to it after the garbage is picked up.

Sealed inside these alkaline cells are harmful materials which are not encountered by consumers during normal use. However, when the batteries enter a landfill, the casings can be crushed, or can easily degrade, which causes mercury and other toxins to leach into the environment.

The problem of batteries in landfills is one of the easiest to solve. Using rechargeable power can significantly reduce the number of batteries which end up in landfills. Rechargeable batteries can be used again and again, up to 1,000 times. One rechargeable cell can replace up to 300 throwaway batteries, keeping the landfill free not only from the batteries themselves, but also from the paper and plastic materials that are used to package them.

There are a number of manufacturers in the country today who deal in rechargeable products and some of them have a number of programs already in place to ensure that rechargeable batteries never enter a landfill at all. For example, one of the largest manufacturers of rechargeable products is now offering a lifetime replacement guarantee on all round cells. If the product ever fails to accept or hold a charge, the company will promptly replace it and recycle the used cell.

If you have an environmental agency in your area, you might like to work on this issue with them, or perhaps they already have a program set up to dispose of used batteries. As a concerned

citizen, your suggestions and input will be invaluable to them as they attempt to come up with some solutions.