

# Store and Dispose of Paint Properly

Do you want to ensure your paint is properly stored so that it's good later? Have paint cans that you need to get rid of, but you don't know how? Here's how to safely store and dispose of your paint.



## Storage

---

### Seal it Up

Seal the paint can properly before you put it away to keep the paint from drying up. If any paint has gotten in the grooves of the paint can, wipe it with a clean rag. Use a rubber mallet to tap the lid down securely. Don't use a hammer - it can distort the lid, making it more difficult to securely seal the can. If you don't have a mallet, you can cover the can with a piece of wood and then hammer the lid closed.

### Location

Store paint in a cool, dark location like a basement. If you do store it in the basement, make sure that it's on a shelf. Moisture from basement floors can rust your paint cans. If you don't have a basement, place them in a cabinet or closet in your house. Extreme hot or cold temperatures can ruin paint. Cold weather can cause latex paint to separate, making it unusable. Heat can dry it out. Very hot temperatures can even trigger a fire with oil-based paints.

## **Space Savers**

If you have cans that are halfway or almost empty, transfer the remaining paint into quart cans or large jars. Then use some labels and a marker to list the brand, paint name, date of purchase, mixture number and the room that you painted. Place a small dollop of paint on the top or side of the can to easily identify the color. If you have more than one color for a room (such as wall color and trim), keep them together. If you're feeling especially organized, you can use a label maker and mark each room on the shelf front.

## **Reopening a Can**

Opening a paint can after it's been sealed for a long time can be difficult. But avoid using a screwdriver to open it. The lid can become warped and it will be difficult to seal it in the future. Use a key that's especially designed for opening paint cans. Lowe's will give you one with your paint purchase.

## **Shelf Life**

Latex or water-based paint typically has a shelf life of ten years. Solvent or oil-based paint can last up to fifteen years. You can test to see if your paint is still good by doing the following:

### **Latex**

First, smell it. Does it smell rancid? If it does, it's gone bad. Secondly, check to see if the paint is separated. There will usually be a thin skin on top with a layer of liquid underneath. Remove the skin and using a paint stick, stir the paint. Check to make sure that the paint isn't hard on the bottom or the sides. If the paint blends together smoothly and appears to be the original color, then it's OK to use. If you're still unsure, brush some of the paint onto a piece of newspaper. If the paint comes out rough and lumpy, you need to dispose of it.

### **Oil-Based**

If it hasn't been exposed to extreme temperatures and was sealed properly, then oil-based paint typically isn't as susceptible to going bad as latex. Just remove the layer of film across the top and stir it well before painting.

# Disposal

---



Paint can be toxic and dangerous to the environment if not disposed of properly. Follow these steps for safely getting rid of that extra paint that you no longer need.

## Latex Paints

### Step 1

---

Here's how to dispose of latex paint without taking it to a recycling center.

Add equal parts cat litter to latex paint in the can. If you have more than a half a can, you can also pour the paint into a lined box or trash can. Then pour in cat litter.

### Step 2

---

Stir the cat litter into the paint until it thickens and will not spill. Allow the mixture to sit for one hour.

### Step 3

---

Throw the dried paint in the can in the garbage. Make sure to remove the lid.

### **Good to Know**

If you don't have much paint left in the can, you can just remove the lid and let the paint dry out on its own. Make sure that it's in a location where small children or pets can't get to it.

There are also commercial paint hardeners that you can purchase if you prefer not to use cat litter. Just follow the manufacturer's instructions.

## **Oil-Based Paints**

### **Step 1**

Oil-based paints are considered hazardous waste and must be taken to a recycling center. Look for a recycling center in your area to safely dispose of your latex and oil-based paints.

### **Good to Know**

Consider donating your paint to a community center, charity, place of worship, local theater or Habitat for Humanity ReStore. They're often working on projects with a limited budget and could use the extra supplies.

Also Consider:

Atlanta Paint Disposal

404-333-8763

<http://atlantapaintdisposal.com/index.html>

# HOW TO DISPOSE OF AEROSOL CANS

## Disposing of Empty Cans

### 1

**Ensure that the can is empty.** Before you toss your aerosol can, take a moment to make sure that it is really empty. If no product comes out of the nozzle and **it does not appear to be clogged**, the can is empty enough to dispose of safely.<sup>[1]</sup>

- If you're not sure if the can is empty, try shaking it. You shouldn't feel any liquid moving inside.
- Aerosol cans that are not empty must be treated differently, as disposing of a partially full aerosol can can be extremely **dangerous**.

### 2

**Refrain from modifying the can.** You don't need to alter an aerosol can in any way to dispose of it. Leave the can exactly the way it is, no matter how you end up disposing of it.<sup>[2]</sup>

- Aerosol cans are pressurized, which means they may explode if tampered with. Never attempt to puncture an aerosol can or expose it to extreme heat. Do not attempt to remove the spray nozzle from the can, even though it is usually plastic.
- If the can has a plastic lid, you can remove this for recycling. (The lid is likely recyclable too.)

### 3

**Consider the contents of the can.** Not all aerosol cans are created equal. Some contain hazardous materials, so you may not be able to dispose of them in your regular trash or recycling. Check the can for indications that it contains hazardous waste.<sup>[3]</sup>

- If the can has specific directions for disposal on it, make sure you follow them. In some cases, you may be required to take the can to a hazardous waste disposal center.
- If you are unsure whether a specific can can be recycled, call your town's recycling center and let them know the contents of the can.

## 4 **Check with your town's recycling program.** *Every municipality has different*

*policies* on recycling, so you may or may not be able to recycle an aerosol can in your area. Look up your city or county's regulations online or call them to inquire about whether aerosol cans are accepted for recycling.<sup>[4]</sup>

- If you do not have single stream recycling in your area, be sure to put your aerosol can with your other metal recyclables.
- If there are no options for recycling an aerosol can in your area, you can throw it in the regular trash (as long as it is empty and the can does not indicate that it needs to be treated as a hazardous material).

## 5

**Get paid for your aerosol cans.** Since many aerosol cans are made of steel or aluminum, some scrap yards may be willing to take them. If you want to be sure before you visit the scrap yard, call ahead of time.<sup>[5]</sup>

- This may not be worth your time if you only have one or two cans. If you have a large number of cans, however, it can really add up.
- While you're at the scrap yard, you may be able to sell other metal scraps as well, like aluminum soda cans. This is especially helpful in states that don't have deposits on cans. (If your state does have deposits, it may be more convenient to return your soda cans at the grocery store.)<sup>[6]</sup>

### Method 2

## Disposing of Full or Partial Full Cans

### 1

**Do not throw away an aerosol can that is not empty.** It may not seem like a big deal to throw a partially full can of hairspray or cleaning product in the garbage, but it can actually be **very dangerous**. **Because aerosol cans are pressurized**, they explode if

they are exposed to high heat or flattened. **This could even happen in the garbage truck, which could cause injuries.**<sup>[7]</sup>

## 2

**Use the product until the can is empty.** The easiest way to get rid of the aerosol can is simply to use the product until the can is empty, and then dispose of the can in the recycling or trash.

- If you can't use it yourself, consider donating it to someone who will use it. For example, cans of spray paint may be used by local artists or students. Your friends or family members may also be able to use your products.
- Take all the spray cans which you need to dispose and keep them at one side. Then go on to follow these steps:
  1. Choose an area where you can safely spray the remnants of a used can without inviting the danger of an explosion or contaminating the environment.
  2. Once you have chosen an area you can spread newspapers on the floor.
  3. Take one of the spray cans to be emptied and start spraying on the newspaper
  4. Once the hissing noise stops you can be sure of the fact that the cans are totally empty
  5. Take kitty litter or paint dry and spread over the wet areas of the paper.
  6. Once dry, the paper can be rolled up and placed in a sealed trash bag and disposed of.
  7. Put the empty can in the recycling

## 3

**Do not attempt to empty the can except by using the product.** When you bring a partially full aerosol can to a hazardous waste collection site, they may puncture it to remove the contents and allow the can to be recycled. While this can be done by trained professionals with specialized equipment, it should never be done at home! Puncturing an aerosol can can cause an explosion, so please leave it to the experts.<sup>[8]</sup>

# 4

**Take your partially full aerosol cans to hazardous waste collection site.** You can locate a collection facility near you by searching on your city's or county's website. You may need to pay a small fee to safely dispose of your aerosol cans, but it should not be significant.<sup>[9]</sup>

- Many towns have events where people can bring in their hazardous waste and get rid of it for free or a reduced cost.

## Sources and Citations

1. ↑ <http://www.rethinkrecycling.com/residents/materials-name/aerosol-cans>
2. ↑ <http://www.earth911.com/recycling-guide/how-to-recycle-aerosol-cans/>
3. ↑ <http://enviro.blr.com/environmental-news/waste/hazardous-waste-disposal/Aerosol-Can-Disposal-Are-You-Following-Your-States/>
4. ↑ <http://www.rethinkrecycling.com/residents/materials-name/aerosol-cans>
5. ↑ <http://enviro.blr.com/environmental-news/waste/hazardous-waste-disposal/Aerosol-Can-Disposal-Are-You-Following-Your-States/>
6. ↑ <http://www.thepennyhoarder.com/collecting-cans/>
7. ↑ <http://www.rethinkrecycling.com/residents/materials-name/aerosol-cans>
8. ↑ <http://www.rethinkrecycling.com/residents/materials-name/aerosol-cans>
9. ↑ [http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/dangermat/aerosol\\_cans.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/dangermat/aerosol_cans.html)