PROPER DISPOSAL OF PAINT AND PAINT CANS

One of the most frequent questions Arkansans ask The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality Recycling Division is, "What should I do with my old paint cans?"

There is more than one correct answer to this question. And since now is the time many are doing home improvement projects, ADEQ staff is offering several easy-to-do and inexpensive solutions.

"If paint goes into a landfill it needs to be a dry consistency," says ADEQ Recycling Director Robert Hunter. "Wet paint, whether it be oil-based or latex, can contribute to leachate problems." If leachate, which is liquid that has dissolved or carries environmentally harmful substances, is not properly managed it can contaminate ground water.

For an inexpensive solidifier, Hunter suggests pouring cat litter, sand or sawdust into the can and stirring it into the paint. This will keep the paint in a solid form that can then be included in your regular trash. The can itself can be recycled. And don't worry about having the can spot free. Even if it has dried paint on the top or the sides, it can still be recycled. The important thing is to make sure all of the liquid has been disposed of properly.

Hunter says you can also pour the paint onto newspaper in a thin layer, let it dry in the sun, and then dispose with the rest of your household waste.

"The one thing we don't want Arkansans doing is opening the lid and setting the can in the sun to dry. What will inevitably happen is only the top few inches will dry. The paint underneath will still be in liquid form," adds Hunter.
In addition to concerns about the landfill leachate, disposing of wet paint can also cause problems for your solid waste districts and even your neighborhood. Many waste collection companies use trucks with compactors. If those paint cans are crushed with wet paint still inside, it can create a mess for the truck, the roads, and even yours or your neighbor’s yard or driveway. Arkansans may want to check with their solid waste districts before doing any kind of paint disposal. Some communities have household hazardous waste collection centers that will take residential quantities of paints, solvents, household chemicals and pesticides.

Another option is to check with local churches or organizations like Habitat for Humanity. Often times, they can use your old paint to re-furbish homes for others. The Habitat for Humanity in Pulaski County will accept all colors of paint as long as the can is at least ¾ full.

But when it comes to solid waste of any kind, the best solution can always be found in the first R of the 3 R’s: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Reducing paint waste can be as simple as using a tape measure and a calculator. Nearly every home improvement store now has a paint calculator. Most calculators are available online. Simply enter the dimensions of your project and the calculator can tell you exactly how much paint to purchase. As a rule of thumb, one gallon of paint will typically cover 350 square feet. Using exact calculations will not only reduce waste, but could save you a lot of money.

You can find contact information for your local solid waste district on ADEQ’s website: http://www.adeq.state.ar.us/solwaste/regional_boards_sql.asp