

Safety Tip of the Month: How to Identify Poisonous Materials in the Home and Take Precautions against Becoming Harmed by Them

What is a Pesticide?

A pesticide is a chemical used to prevent, destroy or repel pests. Pests can be insects, mice and other animals, weeds, fungi or microorganisms such as bacteria and viruses. Some examples of pests are termites causing damage to our homes, dandelions in the lawn, and fleas on our dogs and cats. Pesticides also are used to kill organisms that can cause diseases.

Most pesticides contain chemicals that can be harmful to people, animals or the environment. For this reason the Office of Pesticide Programs of the Environmental Protection Agency regulates pesticides in the United States to protect public health and the environment. Here are some examples of pesticide products we use in our homes:

- Cockroach sprays and baits
- Mosquito sprays
- Rat poisons
- Flea and tick sprays, powders and pet collars.

Did you know that these common products are considered pesticides?

- Cleaners used to disinfect the kitchen floor.
- Cleaning products used to remove the mildew on bathroom tiles.
- Household plant sprays.
- Lawn and garden products to kill insects and weeds.
- Some swimming pool chemicals.

What is a Toxic Substance?

A toxic substance means any chemical or mixture that may be harmful to the environment and to human health if inhaled, swallowed or absorbed through the skin. Did you know that some toxic substances are found in nature? There are naturally occurring toxins (poisonous substances coming from living organisms) found in certain plants like poinsettias (that red flower we give as a gift during the Christmas holiday) and even some wild mushrooms and berries. However, the toxic substances contained in most everyday household products are synthetic which means they are man-made. The opposite of toxic substances are non-toxic substances. Non-toxic substances are safe to use and do not harm humans and the environment.

Many of the products you find in your home may have toxic substances. These products include:

- Drain cleaners
- Oven cleaners
- Laundry detergents
- Floor or furniture polish
- Paints
- Pesticides

While these products are useful at home, some of the chemicals in these products can irritate your skin, eyes, nose and throat, or can even poison you - *so be careful!* Kids, you must think about the products you use at home - are they toxic? If they are, be careful when you use them. If you are unsure, please check with an adult before you use them.

About Labels

Many household products contain pesticidal and toxic ingredients that can be harmful to humans, animals or the environment. Even so, we use these products to clean or maintain our home. Or they are useful because they control disease-causing organisms, insects, weeds or other pests. The label is your guide to using products safely and effectively. Always “Read the Label First” to know how to properly use these products and for safety information.

Labels use signal words to show how toxic or hazardous a product can be. There are three different signal words: **CAUTION**, **WARNING** and **DANGER**. Both you and your parents need to be careful whenever products with signal words on their label are used. **[INSTRUCTOR SHOULD PROVIDE SAMPLES FOR CLASSROOM]**

What do you do if you or someone you're with has an accident with any household products?

If you have an accident or are exposed to a pesticide or household product you should tell your parents or other adult in your home **immediately**. Tell them what pesticide or household product you were using and exactly what happened. If possible, show them the container and label. Tell them how much you came in contact with and what part of your body came in contact with it (Was it your eyes or skin or did you swallow some?) If an adult is not close by, and you are hurt or starting to feel sick, then do the following:

- If someone splashes a household chemical in the eyes, rinse out the eyes for 15-20 minutes in the shower or under a faucet. Then call your poison control center. If you do not know that number, then call 911 or your local emergency ambulance number.
- If someone splashes a household chemical on the skin, take off the wet clothing and rinse the skin for 15-20 minutes in the shower or under a faucet. Then call your poison control center. If you do not know that number, then call 911 or your local emergency ambulance number.

- If someone drinks a household chemical, give him or her half a glass of water to drink. Then call your poison control center. If you do not know that number then call 911 or your local emergency ambulance number.
- If someone is not breathing or won't wake up, call 911 or your local emergency ambulance number.

Be prepared for any emergency in your home. Keep your local emergency number, local ambulance number and the local poison control center telephone numbers on or next to your phone. You can usually find these numbers on the inside cover or first few pages of your telephone book.

*This information provided courtesy of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):
www.epa.gov.*