Paints & Paint Products

Figure 1: PaintCare Fee Structure	
Container Size	**Fee**
Half pint	$0.00
Larger than half pint to smaller than 1 gallon	$0.35
1 gallon	$0.75
5 gallons	$1.60

Americans buy more than a billion gallons of paint every year. Most of it gets used, but people frequently end up with leftover paint they no longer want. Leftover paint can be a nuisance to dispose of—oil based paints are flammable and cannot be thrown away in the garbage, and waste haulers will not handle wet paint. In 2014, the Paint Stewardship Act (SB-14-029) was signed into law to create a recycling program for paint and paint products. The paint manufacturers created a non-profit organization, PaintCare (www.paintcare.org), to collect fees from the paint consumer to fund recycling efforts once the paint is no longer useful. Figure 1 is the fee structure based on container size.

Types of Paint

It is important to know whether the paint you're using is water-based or oil-based. Oil-based paints are flammable and may contain toxic materials, and need to be disposed of through a household hazardous waste collection program. Paint thinner should be treated as oil-based paint. Water-based paints are not hazardous and may be thrown away with regular household garbage IF it is completely dried out and the lids are removed from the cans. Read the label first to determine which type of paint you have. Key words are listed in the table below.

It is a good idea to use water based paints and woodworking supplies whenever possible. Not only are they easier to dispose of and safer to use, they also are better for the air. The use of oil-based paints and other petroleum-based products (solvents, degreasers, etc.) is responsible for 15% of all volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in Denver's air and contributes to smog. If a water-based product is not available, look for the lowest VOC content you can find. Information about the VOC content is printed on the label.

Health and Safety Considerations

Figure 2: Oil or Latex Based Paint? Key words to tell the difference:	
Oil-based Paint	**Latex Paint**
Adhesives varnish shellac stain sealer epoxy alkyd urethane "contains petroleum distillates" Flammable Combustible	latex "water-clean up" vinyl acrylic joint compound

Paints are mixtures of pigments, resins, and other additives. These ingredients are dissolved in either water (water-based) or organic solvents (oil-based). Oil based paints are particularly hazardous—they are flammable and many contain toxic chemicals. Be sure to read the label first to learn about important safety precautions. Make sure that you have plenty of fresh air and/or use a respirator that is labeled "NIOSH/MHSA Approved for Organic Vapors". Do not use a dust mask, as it will not protect you against solvent vapors. If you experience headaches, nausea, dizziness, and/or difficulty breathing, stop working and call the Poison Control Center or seek medical attention immediately. You may want to use chemical resistant gloves when working with some paints. Never use gasoline to clean up paint or paintbrushes. Figure 2 is a guide to determining the type of paint based on labeling.

Tri-County Health Department
Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties, Colorado

Household Chemical Roundup Program

Five-Point Program for Leftover Paint

1. Buy Only The Paint You Need

First, always buy only what you need. That way, you reduce the chance of having any paint leftover in the first place. It's the same idea behind reusing grocery bags, or eliminating excess packaging. When you avoid creating waste at the start, you're practicing "pollution prevention". It's a smart way to help the environment!

2. Store Paint so it Lasts for Years

You don't throw away the loaf of bread just because you used a few slices. You wrap it up and store it, so you can enjoy it again *later*. It's the same with paint. Did you know that when properly stored, paint can last for years? Just cover the opening with plastic wrap, and make sure the lid fits securely so the paint doesn't leak. Here's the key step: store the paint can upside down. The paint will create a tight seal around the lid, keeping the paint fresh until you need it again.

3. Use Up All Your Paint Now that you know how to keep your leftover paint fresh for years, don't forget about it. Use it up! Leftover paint can be used on touch-up jobs and smaller projects. You can also blend and mix smaller quantities of similar colors of latex paint to use as a primer on larger jobs, or jobs where the final finish is not critical. (Always make sure you read and follow all label instructions when applying paint.)

4. Donate or Exchange Your Paint

If you just can't use your leftover paint, donate it to community groups, theater groups, schools, churches and others who need or want it. You may even be able to take a tax deduction!

5. As a Last Resort.… Recycle Paint

Recycling is the final step if you have leftover paint you can't use or find a way to exchange or donate. Recycling is available in Colorado year-round, through one-day collection events and retail stores accepting used paint. The first step in recycling paint is to visit www.paintcare.org and find the near drop-off location to you. Type in your zip code under the *Find a Drop-Off Site* tab and the nearest locations will populate below and on the map to the right. Click on the location you desire to find the location details. Always call a drop-off location prior to stopping by and ask if there is adequate storage for the paint you are planning to bring to the location.

Aerosol Cans

Aerosol cans containing propellant are explosive if crushed or incinerated, and should not be placed in the trash. If you no longer hear any hissing when you press the nozzle, the can is empty and may be recycled or thrown away. If you need to get rid of a non-hazardous, non-flammable product in an aerosol can, you may empty it by discharging the contents into a cardboard box or paper bag while outdoors and in a well-ventilated area. Full or partially empty aerosol cans should be disposed of through a household hazardous waste collection program.