



# AFN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

RESPECTING AND PROTECTING MOTHER EARTH

## HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS

### Introduction

Household chemicals, such as those found in everyday cleaning products, can be harmful to human health and the environment. However, weed killer, pesticides, fungicides and other lawn and garden care products, are also common sources of harmful household chemicals. These products can accumulate in the water and soil, adversely affecting the health of plants, animal, fish and humans. These chemicals have varying degrees of toxicity, but most have not been tested to determine long term health effects.



### Considerations and Challenges

Household chemicals not only affect human health; they pose a risk to the environment. Improper disposal of household chemicals, whether in household garbage, down a storm drain, poured or rinsed down the drain or directly on to the ground, constitutes a source of environmental pollution. Many household chemicals seep into the ground, and eventually make their way into ground water, polluting drinking water wells. Chemicals that are poured down the drain enter waste water treatment plants where they cannot be safely treated. They eventually end up in lakes and rivers. They may also disrupt the treatment process, leaving sewage untreated.

Household chemicals are considered hazardous waste if they fall under any of the following categories:

- flammable;
- toxic or poisonous;
- corrosive; or
- reactive.

To reduce the environmental impact of these chemicals, they should be properly disposed of. Hazardous household chemicals should slowly be replaced with safer alternatives as they are consumed. These safer alternatives may include “green” products, or homemade cleaners (see sidebar on page 2). Many major cities have drop-off sites for household chemicals. Rural and reserve communities, however, may not have easy access to these facilities. It is therefore particularly important that they be avoided in these areas.

Household chemicals are readily available for cleaning our homes, cars, clothing and bodies. While the amount that we use individually may appear minimal, the cumulative effect of widespread use of these products poses a significant risk to the environment, particularly aquatic habitats.

Several ingredients found in household cleaning products have been associated with adverse health effects. Some have been associated with increased rates of cancer. Others are believed to affect the reproductive or endocrine systems, causing reproductive problems or developmental difficulties in offspring. Many products used to control weeds or pests, such as insects, are particularly harmful to human health. Aerosol sprays and air fresheners also pose negative health risks.

Household chemicals can also present a health risk if they are not used correctly. For example, using multiple chemicals at one time, such as bleach and ammonia, can result in a toxic mix that is far more dangerous than either chemical on its own.

Although the Environmental Stewardship Unit does not have any initiatives dealing directly with household chemicals, the following projects relate to environmental contaminants:

- National First Nations Environmental Contaminants Program
- First Nations Biomonitoring Project
- First Nation Food, Nutrition and Environment Study
- Chemical Management

### **For More Information**

For more information, please contact environment (613) 241-6789 at the Assembly of First Nations or [environment@afn.ca](mailto:environment@afn.ca).

#### **Alternatives to Household Cleaners:**

- *Window cleaner* = 1 tbsp **vinegar** and 1L water. Use newspaper to avoid streaks.
- **Baking soda** can scour, clean and deodorize, apply directly to surface and scrub.
- **Lemon juice** deodorizes, cleans and adds a natural fresh scent.
- The **sun** is a natural stain remover. Line dry whites to bleach out any stains.
- **ELBOW GREASE!** While these alternatives may be a bit harder to clean with, they ensure a chemical free home!