

## 12. Proper storage of combustible and flammable materials

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### **Manage the risks of flammable household materials**

*Look for the warnings, follow the directions and don't stockpile unneeded items*

Homeowners are often surprised to learn that many of the chemicals in their homes – from paints to cleaners to nail polish remover – are actually highly flammable and, if stored or used incorrectly, can pose both a health and fire risk.

Remember to pay attention to the labels when you buy and bring home a new product. Are there any directions about how to store it or whether it should be kept in a well-ventilated area? Look for symbols or warnings on the packaging and follow them carefully.

The easiest way to reduce risk is to reduce your stockpile of chemicals, solvents, paints, stains and anything else that could act as fuel in the event of a fire. Check with your municipal waste department to find out what they recommend as a method of safe disposal in your area. Many of these products are toxic to the environment and must be disposed of properly.

Once you've weeded out the products you no longer use or need, store the remaining chemicals and paints safely. That means keeping them in an area where they can't be accidentally knocked over and where curious little hands and mouths can't reach them. Store them in their original containers, which should include appropriate warnings and eliminate any questions about what is in the container, and keep them tightly sealed. Do not store the liquids in glass containers as they can shatter and spill.

While you may need gasoline for your lawn mower, snow blower or other tools with gas-powered engines, it must be carefully stored. Never keep gas in a building where there are people living; instead, keep it in an outbuilding, detached garage or shed. Only keep gas in a container sold for that purpose and make sure the container is tightly capped when not in use.

Oily rags are another major fire risk that not everyone fully appreciates. In the process of drying, cloths that have been used to wipe oil-based paints and stains generate heat, which can get trapped within a pile of these rags. If this heat continues to rise quickly enough, it can ignite the rags without the need for a flame to be present. In addition to rags, clothing saturated with these oil-based materials can also react in the same way. The best practise is to let oil-soaked rags and clothing dry fully outside in the open air and not bunched together. Once dry, you can place the rags in a metal container with a tight cover and fill it with water and detergent solution to break down the oils. Check with your municipality for information about how to safely dispose of these rags.