

Hazardous Waste Management

Disposal of Aerosol Containers

Information presented in this fact sheet is intended to provide a general understanding of the regulatory requirements governing the management of disposable aerosol containers. This information is not intended to replace, limit, or expand upon the complete regulatory requirements found in Division 14 of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management Administrative Code.

WHAT IS AN AEROSOL CONTAINER?

An aerosol container is a dispenser that holds a substance under pressure and that can release the substance, usually by means of a propellant gas, in a number of forms such as wet sprays, fine sprays, powder sprays, foams, or pastes. Common liquefied propellants include propane, butane, and isobutane.

WHAT ARE THE SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS FOR AEROSOL CONTAINERS?

Some aerosol products (e.g., paints, solvents, pesticides) are hazardous due to the presence of hazardous ingredients. Aerosol products should be used with adequate ventilation and/or personal protective equipment to prevent inhalation and exposure that may result in harmful health effects. Extreme temperatures may cause containers to rupture and moisture may cause them to rust, resulting in a release of the contents to the environment. Most aerosol containers pose a fire hazard because they contain highly flammable propellants such as propane and butane. Pressurized containers present additional concerns. If punctured, the contents may be released so forcefully that injuries can result. Also, pressurized containers delivered to a landfill present safety concerns during compacting.

WHICH AEROSOL CONTAINERS ARE REGULATED AS SOLID WASTE?

An aerosol container is regulated as solid waste (not hazardous waste) if it:

- 1) Did not contain a material that would be a listed hazardous waste or a characteristic hazardous waste; **OR**
- 2) Is empty, as defined by ADEM Admin. Code r. 335-14-2-.01(7); **OR**
- 3) Is recycled for scrap metal in accordance with ADEM Admin. Code r. 335-14-2-.01(6).

NOTE

According to ADEM Admin. Code r. 335-14-2-.01(7), a container is empty if:

- 1) All materials have been removed that can be using common practices;
- 2) No more than one inch of residue remains in the bottom or no more than 3% by weight of the total capacity remains in the container;
- 3) The internal pressure is at or near atmospheric pressure; and
- 4) It did not contain an acute hazardous waste.

WHICH AEROSOL CONTAINERS ARE REGULATED AS HAZARDOUS WASTE?

An aerosol container is regulated as hazardous waste if it:

- 1) Contains a material that is a listed hazardous waste or a characteristic hazardous waste; **AND**
- 2) Is not empty, as defined by ADEM Admin. Code r. 335-14-2-.01(7); **AND**
- 3) Is not recycled for scrap metal in accordance with ADEM Admin. Code r. 335-14-2-.01(6).

MAY I USE A DEVICE TO PUNCTURE AEROSOL CONTAINERS?

Companies that regularly generate significant numbers of waste aerosol containers may be interested in using a device to puncture and drain the containers. Use of such a device does not require a waste-treatment permit at this time. If you choose to use one, consider the following precautions:

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for operating, cleaning, and maintaining the device.
- Employees operating the device should be thoroughly trained and should wear appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Do not puncture containers with any of these ingredients: ethyl ether (often in starting fluids), chlorinated compounds, pesticides, freons and foams, oven cleaners, unknowns. These should be lab-packed and managed as hazardous waste.
- Sort containers by size and puncture similar sizes at the same time. You may wish to puncture containers with solvents, degreasers, and/or lubricants last to help clean the device.
- Operate only in an open, well-ventilated area. Avoid confined spaces.
- Collect liquids in an appropriate hazardous waste container.

