



Subtitle C: What Is a Hazardous Waste?

Hazardous wastes come in many shapes and forms. They can be liquids, solids, contained gases, or sludges. They can be the byproducts of manufacturing processes or simply discarded commercial products, like cleaning fluids or pesticides. Whatever their form, proper management and disposal are essential to protect human health and the environment.

RCRA provides a general definition of the term “hazardous waste.” EPA has defined by regulation which specific materials are considered hazardous waste under Subtitle C. Under this definition, the universe of potential hazardous wastes is extremely large and diverse. The regulatory definition evolves and changes as new information becomes available. EPA works closely with industry and the public to determine which of these wastes should be subject to the RCRA hazardous waste regulations. The Agency developed four defining characteristics of hazardous waste and four lists of specific hazardous wastes.

According to EPA estimates, of the 13 billion tons of industrial, agricultural, commercial, and household wastes generated annually, more than 279 million tons (2 percent) are “hazardous,” as defined by RCRA regulations.

