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Fact Sheet, January 2010

Universal Waste Fact Sheet

California's Universal Waste Rule allows individuals and businesses to transport, handle and recycle certain common hazardous wastes, termed universal wastes, in a manner that differs from the requirements for most hazardous wastes. The more relaxed requirements for managing universal wastes were adopted to ensure that they are managed safely and are not disposed of in the trash.

What are Universal Wastes?

Universal wastes are hazardous wastes that are widely produced by households and many different types of businesses. Universal wastes include televisions, computers and other electronic devices as well as batteries, fluorescent lamps, mercury thermostats, and other mercury containing equipment, among others.

The hazardous waste regulations (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 22, div. 4.5, ch. 11 section 66261.9) identify seven categories of hazardous wastes that can be managed as universal wastes. Any unwanted item that falls within one of these waste streams can be handled, transported and recycled following the simple requirements set forth in the universal waste regulations (UWR) (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 22, div. 4.5, ch. 23)

Universal wastes are:

1. Electronic devices: Includes any electronic device that is a hazardous waste (with or without a Cathode Ray Tube (CRT)), including televisions, computer monitors, cell phones, VCRs, computer CPUs and portable DVD players.
2. Batteries: Most household-type batteries, including rechargeable nickel-cadmium batteries, silver button batteries, mercury batteries, alkaline batteries and other batteries that exhibit a characteristic of a hazardous waste
3. Electric lamps: Fluorescent tubes and bulbs, high intensity discharge lamps, sodium vapor lamps and electric lamps that contain added mercury, as well as any other lamp that exhibits a characteristic of a hazardous waste. (e.g., lead).
4. Mercury-containing equipment: Thermostats, mercury switches, mercury thermometers, pressure or vacuum gauges, dilators and weighted tubing, mercury rubber flooring, mercury gas flow regulators, dental amalgams, counterweights, dampers and mercury added novelties such as jewelry, ornaments and footwear.
5. CRTs: The glass picture tubes removed from devices such as televisions and computer monitors.
6. CRT glass: A cathode ray tube that has been accidentally broken or processed for recycling.
7. Non-empty aerosol cans

Universal Wastes may not be disposed of in the trash!





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Regulatory Standards for Universal Waste

The UWR has separate requirements for each of the three types of regulated entities:

1. Universal waste handlers
2. Universal waste transporters
3. Destination Facilities

Universal Waste Handlers

A universal waste handler is a generator of universal waste or the owner or operator of a facility that receives universal waste from another universal waste handler, accumulates universal waste, and sends universal waste to another universal waste handler, a facility that accepts hazardous waste, or a foreign country.

A universal waste handler may be:

1. A person (e.g., a household or business) who generates universal waste but does not accept universal waste from others
2. A person who accepts and accumulates universal waste generated by others at his or her facility
3. A person who accepts universal waste generated by others and conducts certain treatment and recycling activities allowed by the universal waste handler regulations

Management Requirements for Universal Waste Handlers (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 22, sections 66273.30-66273.39; additional requirements for handlers who conduct authorized treatment, Cal. Code Regs, tit. 22, sections 66273.70-.77)

- Do not dispose of universal waste or treat universal waste except as provided for in the regulations
- Notify DTSC and/or obtain an EPA identification number
- Use proper containment—non-leaking, compatible containers
- Segregate universal waste in distinct areas
- Determine if materials generated when handling/recycling are hazardous wastes
- Comply with applicable requirements for hazardous waste
- If applicable, comply with zoning requirements when storing universal wastes
- Have spill kits readily available to deal with accidental spills (mercury-containing devices)
- Use proper labeling and markings
- Accumulate universal waste no longer than one year





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- Provide personnel training to personnel who manage universal waste, or who supervise personnel who manage universal waste and keep training records
- Respond to releases of universal waste or its contents; determine if spill residuals are hazardous waste
- Track shipments by keeping records of what was received and shipped (name, address, quantities) for three years

Universal Waste Transporters

A universal waste transporter is a person engaged in the offsite transportation of universal waste by air, rail, highway or water. A universal waste transporter may be:

1. Universal waste handler carrying universal waste in his or her own vehicle
2. A package shipping service (e.g., US Postal Service; FedEx, UPS)
3. A commercial carrier (e.g., a trucking company, a hauler specializing in universal waste, or the operator of a destination facility that offers a universal waste pick-up service)
 - If you do not own or operate a facility that accepts, generates, accumulates, or stores universal waste, but you pick up and transport universal waste (e.g., electronic devices from office complexes) to a recycling or collection facility, you are a universal waste transporter. Universal waste transporters do not need to notify DTSC or submit annual reports for their transportation activities.
 - Universal waste transporters may store universal waste at a transfer facility for up to 10 days (depending on local zoning). A universal waste transporter who exceeds this limit is considered a universal waste handler and is subject to the handler requirements summarized above.

Destination Facilities

A destination facility is a fully-regulated hazardous waste facility that treats, disposes of, or recycles a specific type of universal waste. Examples of destination facilities are hazardous waste recycling facilities and hazardous waste landfills. A destination facility shall manage the universal waste in accordance with the requirements and conditions in its hazardous waste facility permit, unless authorized by section 66273.60 of title 22 of the California Code of Regulations to manage it pursuant to the reduced requirements applicable to universal waste handlers. A destination facility is required to follow certain rules for shipping universal wastes off-site and for rejecting shipments that contain universal waste and is required to keep records of all shipments received for three years. A facility that only accepts and accumulates universal waste is not a destination facility. Such a facility is regulated as a universal waste handler.





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Households and Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Universal Waste Generators (CESQUWG)

Two categories of universal waste handlers—households and CESQUWGs—are exempt from most of the requirements of the universal waste regulations provided they comply with certain conditions. Handlers who qualify for these exemptions are not required:

- To obtain an EPA ID number or otherwise notify DTSC;
- To keep records of shipments or provide annual reports to DTSC; or
- To label their universal waste.

A household is defined to include a single detached residence (e.g., a house) or a single unit of a multiple residence unit (e.g., an apartment or condominium). Households that generate hazardous wastes other than universal wastes (e.g., paints and motor oil) can visit DTSC's household hazardous waste Web page (<http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/UniversalWaste/HHW.cfm>) for information on how to properly dispose of them.

A Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Universal Waste Generator (CESQUWG) is a universal waste generator who produces less than 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of RCRA hazardous waste, including universal waste that is RCRA universal waste and less than 1 kilogram of acutely hazardous waste in a calendar month. (RCRA hazardous waste is hazardous waste that is regulated under the hazardous waste regulations adopted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.)

Pursuant to section 66273.8 of title 22 of the California Code of Regulations, a generator who meets the definition of a household or a CESQUWG is exempt from universal waste handler requirements provided he or she:

- 1) Does not dispose of universal waste;
- 2) Relinquishes universal waste only to another universal waste handler, a universal waste transporter, a destination facility, or a curbside household hazardous waste collection program; and
- 3) Does not conduct treatment of universal waste, except for limited activities enumerated in the regulations (e.g., removing batteries, light bulbs, or mercury switches). This exemption applies only to universal waste generated by the household (e.g. light bulbs, computers, televisions, thermostats, cell phones, etc.), not to universal waste accepted from other people.

Where can I send universal wastes?

A handler may not send universal waste to a municipal solid waste (garbage) landfill or a non-hazardous waste recycling center. All handlers of universal waste must relinquish their universal waste to one of the following:





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1. Another handler (typically a business that specializes in collecting, storing, accumulating and shipping universal wastes). Examples:
 - A household hazardous waste facility
 - A “Take-it-Back Partner” such as a retailer or manufacturer
 - A collection event
2. A universal waste transporter. Examples:
 - A curbside HHW collection program
 - A package service (e.g., postal service, UPS)
 - A destination facility that offers a pick-up service
3. A universal waste destination facility (generally, a facility with a permit to treat, store, or dispose of hazardous waste).

Search engines available to find locations accepting universal waste in your area:
E-Recycle.org; Earth911.org; CalRecycle database; DTSC map; HHW list;

For more information, see DTSC’s Universal Waste Web page at:
<http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/UniversalWaste/index.cfm>

Contact your DTSC regulatory assistance officer at: (800) 728-6942

