

# Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

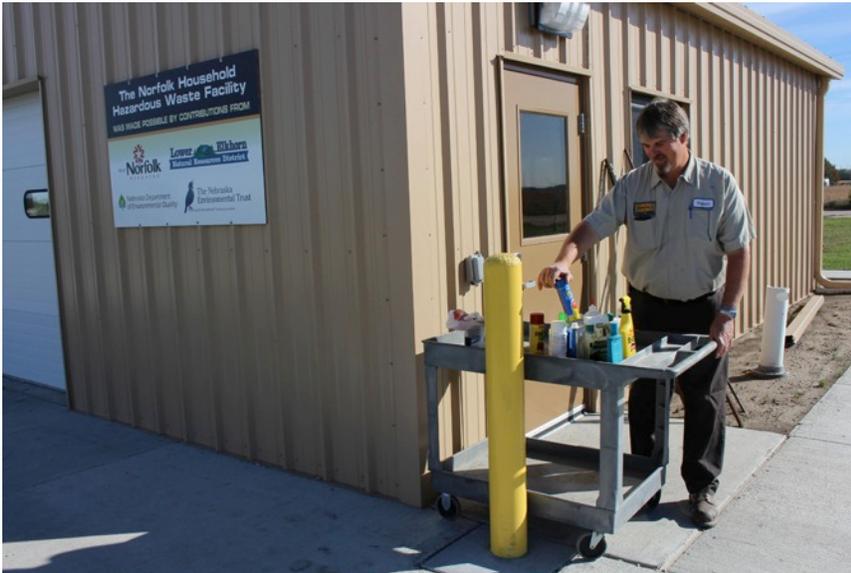
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## “Household Hazardous Waste Facility Accepting Products”

In the last ten months Rob Mercer, City of Norfolk Solid Waste Supervisor, has seen a lot of what people store under their kitchen sinks and on the shelves in their garages.

The City's new Household Hazardous Waste Building at 610 East Monroe Avenue opened last January as a joint project of the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality and the Nebraska Environmental Trust to accept wastes including lawn chemicals and cleaners that people have in their home that can't be put into the garbage.



“If it's in your house or garage in household quantities, we'll take it,” said Mercer.

Those items include cleaning chemicals, garden chemicals, automotive products, 2,4-D, paint removers, solvents, paint, WD-40 and caulking.

Mercer said that many times people will clean out their elderly parents' homes or basements and find lots of products—some that have been on a shelf for years and some that are in quart jars and no one knows quite what it is.

“We've had products come in like rose

and flower dust from the 1970's that contain a high percentage of DDT. Some of the containers brought in have arsenic or ricin in them. It's very important to bring them here and not dump them in the toilet or down the drain as it will eventually end up as poison in the Elkhorn River,” Mercer said.

Instead, Mercer tests to see what type of product is brought in and dumps it into the appropriate barrel until officials from a hazardous waste disposal site in McCook remove it. Since January, Mercer has filled four 55 gallon drums of oil based paint. He has filled two drums of poisons, a half drum of acids and a half drum of bases.

“If you have products that are from the 1980's or 90's or newer first see if you can use them up or give them to a neighbor who may be able to make use of them. If it's anything from the 70's or older or you aren't sure, bring it here,” Mercer said.

The products that come to him unopened he recycles by giving them to various city departments to use. Unused caulk, WD-40, transmission fluid and antifreeze have all been used on city repair projects and for maintaining

equipment. Mercer said he uses the fertilizer and weed killer brought in unopened containers to keep the grass nice around the hazardous waste building.

What has already been opened has to be handled carefully. Mercer wears a face shield, mask, gloves and a rubber apron to work with the assortment of chemicals dropped off at the facility. An emergency shower and eye wash are at the ready. A special machine punctures the aerosol cans and paint cans and drains them before crushing the can.

Mercer said if people have cans with a small amount of latex paint in them, it's best that they dry it out and throw it in their trash as latex paint is non-toxic. If there's more than that left in the paint, it can be brought to the Household Hazardous Waste Building to be used at the landfill. Quantities of the latex paint are mixed with shredded newspaper and water and poured over the trash so items don't blow around.

The Household Hazardous Waste Building is open each weekday from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm and from 7:30 am to 12:00 pm on Saturday. It is closed on Sundays. Mercer said people bringing household hazardous waste items need to stop at the scale house at the entrance of the Solid Waste Facility for directions on where to go next. He also has a few recommendations.

"Don't buy opened products at a rummage sale as it may not be what you think. Bring your items to us in the original container and never mix them as some of the fumes from doing so can kill you. The best practice is to buy only what you can use," Mercer said.

For any questions about household hazardous or other types of wastes, call the Solid Waste Division at 402.844.2230. There is no fee to drop off the household hazardous waste as the partnership that set up the facility is absorbing those costs.